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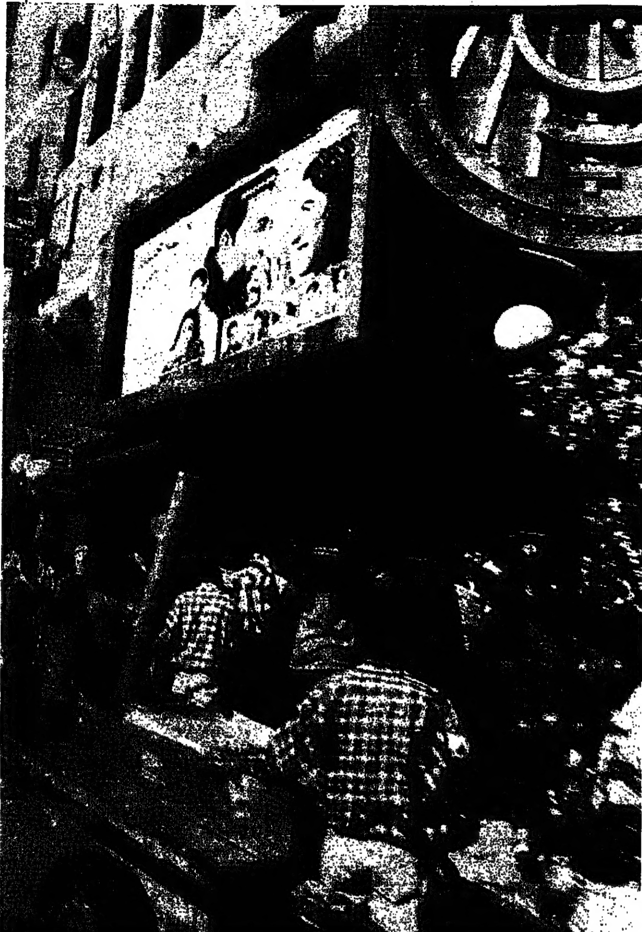
Another killing

FOUR hundred Palestinians shouting anti-Israeli slogans attended the funeral in Jerusalem's old city Tuesday of a Palestinian killed the previous night. Israeli police, already on alert after the death of a Hamas master bomb-maker, beefed up security in the city but kept their distance.

Israeli police said they shot dead Bilal Al-Salaymeh late Monday after he refused to stop his car and tried to outrun two patrol cars along a road from Jerusalem to the West Bank town of Ramallah. The victim's family disputed this account. They said Salaymeh had already stopped when he was shot and denied that he had any harmful intention. His father told Reuters his son was a simple mechanic employed by Israelis and had been on his way to pick up his wife.

Meanwhile, the militant Islamic group Hamas accused the Palestinian Authority of torturing its activists into signing fabricated confessions that they killed master bomb-maker Mohieddin Al-Sharif. The allegation was dismissed by security officials as lies.

(see p.4)



A FEAST OF FILM: Traditionally *Eid Al-Adha* is one of the busiest periods for cinema houses. Producers clamour to book cinemas for premieres and audiences flock to the theatres to see the new releases. It is a tradition that looks set to continue. For a potted cinematic history, *see p.15*.
photo: Sherif Sonbol

Bargaining over 4%

Americans and Israelis continued to haggle over Israeli troop withdrawals, but Washington is resolved not to pressure Netanyahu

Senior Israeli cabinet ministers met in Jerusalem yesterday to debate a possible compromise with the United States over the extent of overdue Israeli troop withdrawals from the West Bank.

Amid reports that US mediator Dennis Ross will return to the region soon for a final attempt at quiet diplomacy to break the 14-month deadlock in Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu met for the second day running with his so-called security cabinet to discuss the US initiative.

The ministers were reportedly debating formulas to increase the amount of additional West Bank land the government would be willing to cede to entice the Palestinians into entering negotiations on a final peace agreement, Israeli media reported.

According to the reports, Netanyahu has proposed that in addition to the nine per cent area of the West Bank Israel has said it was willing to give up, it would yield partial control to the Palestinians of an additional three to four per cent.

In this additional area, the Palestinian Authority (PA) of Yasser Arafat would control the civilian administration but Israel would have total security control and Palestinian police could not enter the zone, the reports said.

The compromise formula would bring the Israeli pullback offer near the 13.1 per cent of the West Bank Washington is reportedly demanding.

Currently, the PA has full control over three per cent of the West Bank, known as Area A, and partial control over 24 per cent, Area B, where Palestinians run civilian affairs and security is jointly provided by Palestinian police and the Israeli army. Zone C, the rest of the territory, is under full Israeli control.

Uri Arad, Netanyahu's diplomatic adviser, declined to confirm or deny reports of a possible compromise.

"Beyond a withdrawal from nine per cent, there is almost no room for manoeuvre if we want to protect our security interests, but we can discuss other ideas presented by the Americans," he said.

Israeli reports said Ross would return to the region for a last try to reach a compromise formula on the troop withdrawals after the Jewish Passover holiday, which begins tomorrow and lasts for eight days.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair is also expected to visit the region soon with "specific proposals" to unblock the stalled peace process, Foreign Secretary Robin Cook announced.

Declaring he was "deeply concerned" about the state of the peace process, Cook said that Blair would travel to the Middle East between 17-21 April.

The Palestinian Authority, which demands that Israel withdraw from 30 per cent of the West Bank at this time under interim peace agreements, has called on Washington to make its compromise offer public.

Such a move would be widely viewed as designed to pressure Netanyahu for concessions and Israel has unleashed its powerful lobbying network in the US to avoid this.

President Bill Clinton discussed the situation with Ross and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright Monday night and apparently decided to hold off on any public move while Ross makes an additional try at quiet diplomacy.

A senior US official confirmed to *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the previous idea of going public with the American plan is dormant for now, at least until the administration exhausts its efforts with the two parties.

Indicating that Washington has no intention of putting pressure on Israel, if only for the time being, the official said the success of the American efforts "depends 100 per cent on the parties."

The view from Cairo is pessimistic, but this did not prevent Egypt from stepping up its contacts with other parties with the aim of keeping alive the US initiative. "In addition to the close Egyptian-Palestinian and Egyptian-Arab contacts, there are Egyptian contacts with the US, Europe and Israel," said Foreign Minister Amr Moussa.

According to diplomatic sources, Egypt is aware that the US ideas "are not the best thing that could happen to the peace process because they have shifted significantly to adopting many of the Israeli views," and yet they remain the only way out of the stalemate.

Netanyahu telephoned President Hosni Mubarak last Sunday to exchange views. According to Moussa "Netanyahu said that he is still determined to continue with the peace process and that he hopes to reach a settlement. This is all very nice. However, when he says that he is still insisting on his other [intransigent] policies, he undermines the credibility of what he says" about making peace, Moussa added.

***Hoda Tewfik** in Washington,*
***Dina Ezzat** in Cairo,*
Wire dispatches

INSIDE

Pilgrimage in cyber space

As the rituals of *hajj* reached their climax, Amira Howeidy followed thousands of non-pilgrims as they searched for information on a variety of websites

The *hajj*, the annual pilgrimage of Muslims to holy shrines in Saudi Arabia, is conquering new forums — Cable News Network and the world wide web.

For the first time CNN, the world's most famous news network, broadcast live proceedings of the ritual, in which more than two million Muslims from some 100 nations took part. CNN's star journalist Riz Khan became one of the first Western journalists to report on Islam's fifth pillar and most poignant spiritual experience. Appearing in two daily live reports, Khan, as Ahmed Bahgat, a writer on Islamic affairs, pointed out, displayed extensive knowledge of the ritual. Most watchers agreed, deciding that CNN's coverage was satisfactory.

But watching live coverage on satellite television and browsing through cyber space are definitely different.

Type the word "*hajj*" on any search engine on the internet, and you get hundreds of varying matches: *fatwas*, fiery debates in discussion groups defending or questioning the ritual, question-answer websites, pictures, articles and glossaries defining much of today's cyber Islam.

For example, question number 431 on *www.islamicity.org/dialogue.* website reflects mainstream Islamic culture in the non-Arab nations of Asia and Africa.

"Is there any special pilgrimage described as "grand" or "*hajj akbar*"? If so, when does it fall?". The answer: "No, there is nothing called grand pilgrimage. There is a mistaken notion that if the day of [standing on Mount] Arafat happens to be on Friday, then that pilgrimage is grand and it is rewarded as seven times the reward of an ordinary pilgrimage..."

Another question: "People in my home country, India, say that a wife may not perform pilgrimage, pay *zakah* [alms], or offer the sacrifice on *Eid Al-Adha* using her husband's money... please comment." The answer, asserting that Islam treats men and women as equals, is that a man is not responsible to pay for the travel expenses of his wife. But "if he willingly pays for her travel, she may accept and go on pilgrimage... which is valid... She would have earned more reward if she were to pay for her own expenses."

Instead of citing a recognised Islamic reference as the basis of these answers, each *fatwa* is followed by the simple statement that "the source is *Arab News — Jeddah*".

A "*hajj*" match came under the title "Disaster Prevention," an article urging the Saudi government to "anticipate," rather than "react swiftly," to the tragedies that are likely to occur during the *hajj* season. Last year 340 people lost their lives in a major fire caused by the explosion of a cooking gas cylinder.

But other disasters, said a member in a discussion group, remain the "much mistaken beliefs on Islam and the rituals practiced by Muslims, such as the *hajj*."

The "democratic" forum of the internet is the only channel one can use to express views while at the same time monitor the views of others in the global village. Where else can a person interested in Islam exchange views with others at the other end of the globe but only a click-of-the-mouse away?

"It is interesting to actually *know* what views exist," Amal El-Taher, a Muslim internet user pointed out, "but why don't we have web sites portraying the true image of Islam and Muslims?" she asked.

Although the language barrier remains an obstacle, tens of Islamic web sites have now swelled to hundreds, explaining the five pillars of Islam. Many of them are devoted entirely to the *hajj*. A website that offers extensive and elaborate background on the *hajj* along with pictures is "*Hajj*: The Journey of a Lifetime" (*www.islamicity.org/ Mosque/ jlthajj.html*).

It features an interesting piece written by "the first English woman to perform the *hajj*," Lady Evelyn Cobbold in 1934. Describing the feelings pilgrims experience during the *wuquf* at Arafat, she said that "it would require a master pen to describe the scene, poignant in its intensity, of that great concourse of humanity of which I was one small unit, completely lost to their surroundings in a fervour of religious enthusiasm. Many of the pilgrims had tears streaming down their cheeks; others raised their faces to the starlit sky that had witnessed this drama so often in the past centuries."

In-depth *hajj* data can also be accessed at *http:// www.ummah.net/hajj*, one of the many home pages on the 'Islamic Gateway' site, operated by a London-based charitable education trust. The page offers information on *hajj* rites, practical tips, a glossary of *hajj* terms and, interestingly enough, tips for teachers on the topic. According to Monzur Ahmed, who runs the *hajj* page, it has received more than 50,000 visitors. "The purpose of the page is to provide Muslim and non-Muslim visitors with useful and comprehensive information about *hajj* and *Eid Al-Adha*," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

However, *hajj* information, as is the case with all cyber data, remains a controversial issue, particularly with regard to its reliability. This seems not, however, to have deterred an increasing number of surfers.

Safe *hajj*

A SEA of men, women and children, most of them in white robes, circled the Kaaba, Islam's holiest shrine, Tuesday as the climax of the annual journey to Mecca. An estimated 2.3 million people from about 100 countries made the annual pilgrimage, or *Hajj*, this year, AP reported.

Pilgrims and Saudi officials said the rites passed off smoothly despite the crowds and the 35 celsius heat. Saudi authorities have taken extra measures, including putting up more than 10,000 fireproof tents, to avoid any repetition of the incident last year in which 343 pilgrims were killed and 1,500 injured when a fire broke out in the pilgrim camp.

Cairo slams US alarm



Officials shrugged off a State Department warning that US interests in Egypt could be the target of a terrorist attack, but tourism entrepreneurs expressed fears about its impact

Presidential adviser Osama El-Baz urged the United States on Sunday to reconsider its warning of a possible militant attack against American interests in Egypt, saying it was unfounded and unjustified.

Last Friday, the State Department said the US government had received "information of undetermined reliability that extremist groups may be planning terrorist attacks against US interests in the near future."

Shrugging off the warning, El-Baz said: "I think it was a hasty emotional reaction, with nothing to justify it. If you listen to someone who spreads a rumour that's unfounded and then base your policy on it and take certain *actions on that basis. I believe this is* not worthy of a country like the US."

The State Department's statement said: "US citizens travelling to or residing in Cairo are advised to exercise greater caution than usual."

El-Baz urged Washington to withdraw the warning, saying the security situation was under control. "Security in Egypt in general is in good shape," he said. "In Cairo, there is not the slightest indication of a security risk. We are in touch with the US government and it is our expectation that they will reverse their position because of the negative impression it gives of the situation here."

But a US embassy official denied that the warning was groundless and said the US government had no plans to withdraw it. "We *certainly* don't take these things lightly and we wouldn't issue a groundless warden *message*," the official said.

Officials at the Interior Ministry declined to comment, but a senior security source told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that there was no reason for worry.

The source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said: "We understand the hidden purposes behind such a statement at this time. The claim that security in Egypt is threatened by terrorism is designed to serve political purposes and does not reflect any actual security concerns."

The source added that no additional security precautions will be taken. "We do not say that terrorism is finished, but we emphasise that security is firmly under control," he said.

The source suggested that the announcement could be related to the *latest confrontation between* Israel and the Islamic resistance movement Hamas, following the killing of a Hamas explosive expert.

Last month, reports emerged of meetings between a US embassy diplomat and Islamist opposition figures, including Montasser El-Zayyat, *de facto* spokesman for the Gama'a Al-Islamiya.

Zayyat said he was asked by the American diplomat whether US interests might be targeted by Islamist militants if the US directed a military blow against Iraq. Zayyat said he replied in the affirmative.

Security experts, for their part, insisted that Islamist militants in this country had never targeted American interests in the past and were unlikely to do so in the future. "Militant groups have not carried out a single attack against American interests or any other foreign interests," said Fouad Allam, former chief of the Interior Ministry's anti-terrorism department. "*They have never shown in*terest in foreign politics and will never launch an attack against Americans."

Allam recalled that a so-called International Islamic Front was formed last month and issued a *fatwa*, threatening to kill Americans. "But nothing happened and nothing will happen against Americans in Egypt. Militant groups target the government regime and its establishments, particularly the security establishment," he said.

But tourism entrepreneurs expressed fear that the American warning could worsen the situation in the already crippled industry.

"Things have been bad for tourism since the Luxor massacre and the number of tourists has fallen drastically. Such warnings could make things worse," *said Ezzeddin* El-Shabrawi, general manager of Egyptian-American Tours.

Nagwa Emad, public relations manager of Sonesta hotels, believes that such a warning will have a serious effect on American tourism to Egypt. "We do not have any cancellations so far *from other nationalities*, but the movement from the States will definitely be affected," she said. "The number of American *visitors dropped* sharply following the Luxor massacre. Now after this warning, the market will be set back three or four years."

George Ghobrial, general manager of Royal Crown Hotel and Royal Travel Agency, noted that, in any case, the months of May and June are *usually* the "dead season". Consequently, he said he could not foretell what impact the American warning might have. "We have *to* wait and see," he added.

Ghobrial said that "we are very hopeful *for the Arab season which be*gins in July. We are expecting an Arab boom and believe that the shopping festival, from *20 July to 20 Au*gust, will help a lot. But as for the international movement, it needs a year and a half to recover properly."

Reported by ***Amira Ibrahim*** *and* ***Rehab Saad***

A third death sentence for Gama'a commander

Two Gama'a Islamiya militants have been sentenced to death by a High State Security Court for plotting attacks against top officials. **Khaled Dawoud** reports

In a five-minute session last Thursday, the High State Security Court sentenced to death two leading figures of the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, Mustafa Hamza and Said Abdel-Hakim. Presiding judge Salaheddin Badour announced that he was referring their dossiers to the Grand Mufti of the Republic — a euphemism for the death sentence. The Mufti's approval is usually a technicality.

This was the third death sentence passed in absentia against Hamza, who is described as the Gama'a military commander, standing second in the hierarchy after overall leader Rifai Ahmed Taha. Hamza is believed to be the mastermind *behind the failed attempt on President Hosni* Mubarak's life in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, in June 1995.

Hamza and Abdel-Hakim topped a list of 22 militants standing trial on charges of belonging to an underground group which aims to overthrow the government by force. Sentences will be handed down on 4 May, Badour said.

According to prosecutors, Hamza, who is believed to reside in Afghanistan, ordered the defendants to assassinate top government officials, including People's Assembly Speaker Fathi Sorour, as well as several journalists, writers and entertainers. The defendants also planned to carry out attacks against tourists, prosecutors said.

The defendants were divided into two groups: one responsible for carrying out attacks in Cairo and another for launching attacks in the southern province of Minya, prosecutors said. Some of the defendants were said to have received military training in camps run by Hamza in Afghanistan and the Sudan before they were sent to Egypt. The case has been dubbed by the Arabic-language press as that of the "returnees from Afghanistan and Sudan."

Most of the defendants were arrested in late 1995 and were held *in detention until their trial* opened last year. According to police investigations, Hamza used to contact Abdel-*Hakim and Mohamed Abdel-Fattah Radwan*, another defendant, to inform them where the explosives, that were to be used in their terrorist operations, were *hidden*. The explosives were usually concealed in the restrooms of mosques in the Cairo districts of Ramses, Daher, Ghamra and Hadayek El-Qubba.

Last Thursday's session was held under tight security at the Abbasiya Court Complex. The defendants shouted anti-government slogans even before Badour had entered the courtroom. The presiding judge is well-known for passing harsh sentences against militants, and is a leading figure on the militants' hit list.

Badour usually gets involved in heated arguments with defendants over their extremist views, citing Quranic texts and sayings of the Prophet Mohamed to prove that they are not orthodox Muslims, but terrorists.

The defendants also raised banners as they stood inside an iron cage. One of the banners read: "Imprisonment and execution will not make us turn away from Islam."

Abdel-Hakim smiled and thanked God after he heard the death sentence passed against him. His father approached the cage, crying, but Abdel-*Hakim knelt down and kissed his hand, saying*: "Don't be sad, father."

Militants believe that they are fighting for God and *Islam*, and that dying for their *cause* will make them martyrs who are promised heaven.

Hamza was first sentenced to death in absentia by a military court in December 1992. He was sentenced to death again, also by a military court, in November 1993 for ordering the failed assassination attempt against Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif.

Hamza was arrested following the assassination of the late President Anwar El-Sadat in October 1981 and was sentenced to seven years imprisonment. After his release, he left Egypt reportedly for Afghanistan.

There is no appeal against sentences passed by state security courts, which operate under the emergency law that has been in effect since Sadat's assassination. Only if the President of the Republic declines to approve a sentence will it be returned to the court.

Defendants can ask for clemency, but since late 1992 all such requests have been turned down.

Military and state security courts have sen*tenced more than 100 militants to death since* the Gama'a started its anti-government campaign of violence six years ago. But only about *60 militants have been executed* and the others are still at large, mainly outside the country.

More than 1,200 people, including police, militants, tourists and Copts, have been *killed* in militant-related violence during the past six years.

Public health: a risky affair?

The death sentence passed against nurse Aida Noureddin opened a pandora's box of questions about the public health system. **Fatemah Farag** investigates

"One who enters is lost, one who leaves is born again." This popular Egyptian saying reflects the little trust *Egyptians have in the public health* system. The lack of trust is fueled by the ambiguity of accountability, aptly illustrated by the recent *trial* and conviction of nurse Aida Noureddin in Alexandria.

"A study carried out in the Imbaba-Mohandessin area showed that 60 per cent of out-patients go to private clinics while only 27 per cent of in-patients go to private hospitals. This proves that people prefer private health services but many cannot afford them," said Dr Ibrahim Mustafa, head of the health insurance unit at the Doctors' Syndicate.

According to the 1997 Egypt Human Development Report (EHDR), Egyptians suffer from diarrhea, gastro-intestinal diseases, anaemia, trachoma and an array of chronic infections and parasitic diseases. Consequently, for a large section of the population, classified as low-income groups, the performance of the public health system literally becomes a matter of life and death.

Minister of Health Dr Ismail Sallam said in a recently published interview *that LE320 million* had been allocated to develop public health services in the fiscal year 1997-98. Moreover, *Mrs Suzanne Mubarak* announced earlier this year that 1998 would be the year for expanding health insurance coverage.

But despite these and other indications of a real increase in expenditures on health services, a painful discrepancy remains between what is spent and the actual services offered.

Souad Ibrahim has been going to the government hospital in Imbaba for a week now. "Every day I take off from work and come to see the dentist. Either he is not in, or else there are too many people ahead of me," she said, pointing towards a large crowd.

At the same time, a nurse was giving a young man a list of what he should buy for his mother who will undergo surgery soon: cotton, an oxygen mask and medicine. "Still, it is cheaper than the private hospitals," he explained before rushing off.

Dr Amr Abbas, a professor at the Suez Canal Faculty of Medicine, said that health services are financed either by the government or the patients themselves, adding that patients account for 70 per cent of what is spent on these services. His argument is that since the percentage spent by individuals is so high, there is no room for greater privatisation of the health sector.

*To date, Egypt has seven health sys*tems: the free service offered by the Ministry of Health; the Curative Care Organisation, *under the ministry's* auspices; the health insurance programme; university health care; *mil*itary and police services; companies (private and public) which offer health services to their staff and private health care. Abbas argues that the lack of coordination between these systems results in a great waste of already limited resources. "People go to several of these hospitals or clinics and this overlapping results in a loss of money, especially in the area of medication... There is no follow-up because patients are not given files and so there can be no proper documentation," he explained.

Further, despite the fact that approximately 60 per cent of the ministry's budget is allocated to the salaries of doctors and staff, it is common knowledge that doctors and nurses are underpaid. Moreover, the ratio of doctors to nurses is one to one compared to the international ratio of one to three. As a result, doctors do not have adequate assistance while nurses are overworked. Yet, it is these people, and not the system, who take the brunt of the public's wrath, should something go wrong. "Families of the patients *sometimes* beat us up and use foul language if anything goes wrong," said a nurse at Alexandria University Hospital.

In addressing the human factor, *training is a major issue. According to* Abbas, medical students receive a good university education but there is no regulation that stipulates the necessity of re-licensing, which would require proof of continuous education — a must in the West every two or three years. The syndicate in Egypt organises a yearly three-week training course but the number of those with access to it is limited.

In addition, the training received by medical students is usually not oriented to the community needs they will be servicing. "A doctor is grilled on the causes of cancer of the retina instead of diarrhea control, although he will face the latter hundreds of times more throughout his work," Abbas said.

The syndicate's Mustafa argued that there must be incentives to generate a re-training momentum. "We have to make it clear in concrete terms to doctors that they are going to be rewarded for their continuous education efforts and that *these efforts will not* simply result in just another certificate hanging on the clinic's walls," he said.

Appropriate technology is another issue. It is not uncommon to find a hospital *with an advanced X-ray ma*chine and no cotton. "We certainly need advanced technology but there should be priorities. It is not logical for a small provincial hospital to have 10 CD scanners. What do they need them for?" asked Mustafa. He ex*plained that the reason behind the im*balance is the terms of the foreign grants awarded to health organisations.

Another problem is that the system is largely oriented towards curative medicine despite the fact that major health problems are mainly endemic and amenable to preventive action. Hospitals absorb two-thirds of the ministry's budget while primary health services receive 25 per cent and preventive only 12 per cent.

There is also the unequal distribution of budgetary allocations between urban and rural areas in favour of the former. The 1995 EHDR indicates that provincial hospitals receive only three per cent of the total budget, compared to 58 per cent for hospitals in urban areas.

Also needed are unified guidelines for medical practice, quality control — the lack of which is illustrated by the absence of regular auditing sessions — and specialised hospital administrators.

In the meantime, the public health system remains the only resort for many, with prices for a check-up as *low as LE1. "We put our lives in the* hands of God," said one woman as she stood in line, with her baby on her *shoulder*.

Self-proclaimed 'Mahdi' under detention

An unemployed engineer has proclaimed himself Al-Mahdi Al-Muntazar, insisting that he and his followers alone will survive an imminent deluge. **Amira Ibrahim** reports

Police raided an apartment in the Giza district last week and arrested Bahaeddin Ahmed Aqqad, an unemployed engineer and self-proclaimed *Al-Mahdi Al-Muntazar* — an equivalent of the Messiah in Shi'ite Islam — *together with 29 of his* followers, including seven women. Aqqad had claimed that Egypt would be engulfed by a massive deluge later this month and that God would send a ship to save him and his followers.

According to security sources, Aqqad, 49, and his followers are a breakaway faction from the outlawed *Tabligh Wal Da'wa* (preaching and *propagation*) group, first established in India half a century ago. The teachings of the group were brought to Egypt by Egyptians who worked in the Gulf states more than 20 years ago. The main principle of the group is that a Muslim should devote himself to the *propagation of Islam*. Aqqad taught that work, in any form, was sinful.

Aqqad and his male followers were remanded in custody for 15 days. The seven women were released for humanitarian reasons.

State Security Prosecutor Hisham Badawi told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that members of this bizarre sect were being in*vestigated on charges of deriding* revealed religion and using religion to promote an extremist ideology. "They condemn orthodox Islamic teachings as contrary to their own beliefs and consider all forms of work to be un-Islamic," Badawi said.

Police sources said that Aqqad and his followers may be referred to the Islamic scholars of Al-Azhar to examine their beliefs and refute their arguments. But Badawi said that the evidence seized and Aqqad's confessions made this unnecessary.

Self-proclaimed "prophets" are often *mentally disturbed, but this* does not appear to be the case with Aqqad. Last month, a man *who also claimed that he was the* Mahdi and attacked the sheikh of the Sayeda Zeinab Mosque, was confined to a mental hospital.

There have been many others. *In 1986, a doctor* who proclaimed himself the awaited Mahdi, was sentenced to five years in prison.

Islamic scholar Abdel-Sabour Chahine says a distinction should be drawn between those who are mentally disturbed and those who are not. Those *who* suffer from mental disorders are "victims and we should give *them a helping hand*," Chahine wrote recently. "But those who insult religion and denounce its teachings should be viewed as heretics."

Recalling Habib's message

Religious leaders and NGO representatives gathered to commemorate the first anniversary of the late Samuel Habib's death by highlighting his pioneer work in promoting national unity and tolerance. Mariz Tadros was in attendance

More than 300 members of various NGOs and representatives of different religious denominations gathered last week to mark the first anniversary of the *death of the* Rev. Samuel Habib (1928-1997), the former head of the Evangelical Church in Egypt and founder of the Coptic Evangelical Organisation for Social Services (CEOSS). The symposium, held under the auspices of Mrs Suzanne Mubarak, was organised by the NGO Commission for Population and Development (NCPD). The aim was not only to reminisce about Habib's achievements, but also to reflect on approaches to civic society development. However, in the light of opposition to a US Congressional bill which claims to seek to prevent religious persecution worldwide through the imposition of sanctions, many delegates chose to emphasise Habib's work in promoting religious tolerance and national unity.

Mervat Tellawi, minister of insurance and social affairs, speaking on behalf of Mrs Mubarak, *said that Egypt will not forget* the work of people like Samuel Habib. Such gatherings, she added, demonstrate the unbreakable *unity of the different* religious denominations and "reassure us about Egypt's present and its future."

Aziza Hussein, chairwoman of the NCPD, spoke of Habib as "a symbol of national unity," pointing to his increasing dedication to this cause in the last few years of his life. She reminded delegates of his celebrated visit to the US in 1995 with Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, Grand Mufti at the time, with the aim of changing the negative perceptions of Islam in the West. "He always said that the problem is not with religions themselves but with those who chose to interpret them in a literal or fundamentalist manner," she said.

Mervat Akhnoukh, head of CEOSS, spoke *of Habib's firm belief in the importance of* serving people on a completely non-denominational basis. Even when he started work *in the 1950s in the remote villages of* Minya, he was determined that his first efforts to improve life in the community would not discriminate along lines of class, gender or religion, she said.

It was in the heart of Upper Egypt, where he sought to live in the company of the most marginalised groups, that Habib started his first literacy programme. The small initiative grew steadily over almost 50 years to address all areas of community development: education, health, combating harmful practices affecting women and training community members to become community leaders. CEOSS, *which was officially* established in 1950, now serves more than 2 million Christians and Muslims. "He did not *believe in relief intervention*; he preferred to look for the causes of poverty and treat them at the root. His was a constant struggle against poverty, hunger and illiteracy," Akhnoukh said. On another front, he took every opportunity to emphasise the "partnership between the mosque and the church" which, in practice, translated into a continuing dialogue on issues of national interest and significance, she added.

Saadeddin Ibrahim, a professor of sociology, spoke of how Habib encouraged people's participation in implementing development projects in the 1950s, long before the concept became fashionable in the 1990s. Habib, Ibrahim said, believed in "real participation," so much so that when the people in one village *told him that their first* priority was to build a mosque, he promptly responded by raising the funds for it.

He was also pioneer in acting to promote the people's awareness of social issues and the importance of unity, peace, democracy *and the protection of human rights*, especially women's rights, Ibrahim said.

Sheikh Kamel Kotb, who spoke on behalf of the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar, was full of praise for Habib's efforts to dissipate misconceptions about religion, biased interpretations and intolerance.

Sheikh Abdel-Sabour Chahine, vice-president of the Higher Council for Islamic Affairs, spoke of Habib as a model for religious leaders whose role must necessarily be religious enlightenment for all. "National unity is the force that enables the Egyptian people to withstand any powers which may seek to divide us," he said. Copts and Muslims have always appreciated each other and worked together in harmony, he said, telling a *personal anecdote to back up his point*. "*In* one of the villages in Menoufia, I wanted to establish an Islamic centre and it just happened that the most appropriate piece of land for the project belonged to the local priest. When I approached him about buying it, he gave it to me for free as a token of our fraternity and friendship," Chahine said.

Makram Naguib, an evangelical priest, spoke of how Habib approached religious dialogue in a spirit of open-mindedness, perseverance and patience, avoiding delicate points and approaching issues in a holistic manner.

The closing thoughts were those of Samir Eleish from the NCPD. "What after Samuel Habib?" he pondered. "When Samuel Habib started his work 50 years ago, he fought against illiteracy, poverty and ignorance. Are they no longer with us? And to what extent are we prepared to ensure that his message lives on?"



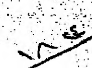








photo: Sherif Sonbol

COPTIC GREETINGS, EID AFTERNOONS: Pope Shenoudah III, head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, called on Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, on Sunday to convey the Copts' greetings on the occasion of *Eid Al-Adha* (feast of sacrifice) (above). The Pope praised the work of Al-Azhar and its affiliated institutions and expressed the hope that "this blessed occasion will serve to promote the national unity of Muslims and Christians." By Tuesday, the holiday spirit had infected everyone, as offices closed, the warm weather settled in and the streets emptied of cars as families across Egypt gathered to eat *fattah* to mark the start of the feast. Even the stillness and repose of the Japanese garden in Helwan (right) could not calm the high jinks of those recently released from school and work — and keen to work off the morning's extra calories.

Disabled by a heartless bureaucracy

A private voluntary organisation has found itself entangled in a web of state bureaucracy and, as **Mariz Tadros** finds out, it does not seem to be the only one

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are becoming increasingly disenchanted with the government's bureaucratic entanglements that hinder their voluntary work. The Voice of the Mentally Retarded, a non-governmental organisation seeking to provide better services for the mentally handicapped, estimated to be around two million in Egypt, has found itself embroiled in a battle with the Cairo Governorate over land for a project which the association wants to launch.

As Dr Ahmed Amin, the association's secretary, explained, the group has been trying to raise funds for a village for the disabled which it wants to establish in Qattameya, east of Cairo. The village would include a technical training centre for the disabled, another centre for training doctors, a community-based rehabilitation scheme and accommodation for disabled persons whose parents have died and who have no one to care for them. The village, expected to cost LE15 million, would accommodate 150 persons.

"One of the greatest worries of a parent of a handicapped child is what will happen to him or her after he or she dies. Who will look after them?" said Amin. The association, headed by former Health Minister Ali Abdel-Fattah, asked the Cairo Governorate to allocate a plot of land for the village. The governorate assigned the group three feddans at Qattameya. But the land was not turned over to the association, which prompted Mervat Tellawi, minister of social affairs, to intervene on the NGOs behalf.

In response, the governorate announced that a committee in charge of the matter had decided that the land would be sold to the association at a reduced price — LE1 million. Members of the association, justifiably outraged, felt that they were being penalised for their voluntary work.

Fathi Ismail, head of the property department at the governorate, said that he had suggested that the land be leased to the association for the nominal rental fee of LE1. But his idea was turned down by the governorate's executive council. "They rejected my suggestion on the grounds that it would be better and safer for the association if it bought the property because the area is very attractive to investors and to guarantee that the land would not be reclaimed by some governor in the future under any pretext," he said.

But Ismail argued that the LE1 million demanded by the governorate is still a reduced price because it does not include the cost of the infrastructure. He added that it is up to the governor, if he so wishes, to repeal the committee's decision and opt for the first suggestion, which is rent for a nominal fee.

According to prominent columnist Salama Ahmed Salama, volunteers in private voluntary organisations (PVOs) are often treated like second-class citizens by government civil servants who view them with suspicion. Their work, he said, is often undermined by long-winded bureaucratic procedures.

In his daily column in *Al-Ahram*, Salama wrote, "It is clear that the head of property at the governorate prefers that the land be sold to an investment company or a housing contractor... because of the benefits that will be gained by a handful of investors and bureaucrats."

Salama told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that immediately after he wrote about the problems of the Voice of the Mentally Retarded, he was swamped with letters from PVOs who said they face all kinds of obstacles with the state bureaucracy, including haphazard orders to confiscate land for no justifiable reason. "It seems that unless the governor personally intervenes, the problem won't be solved. But this will only deter people from serving their communities," he added.

Belly-dancers also need a union

The revelation that a professional union supposedly reserved for press and media workers has been opening its doors to belly-dancers has raised more than a few hackles. **Gihan Shahine** investigates

You would hardly expect to see portraits of Dina and Fifi Abdou hanging alongside Lech Walesa and Arthur Scargill in the Hall of Fame of International Labour. Yet however neatly a girl can ripple her midriff, she still needs a more collective body to turn to when the forces of capital threaten to encroach upon her rights. Thus it is that, since 1995, some 2,300 belly-dancers have joined the Syndicate for Workers in the Press, Printing and Mass Media (SWPPMM).

What are they doing *there* one might ask? On one level, the answer appears simple. Belly-dancers are effectively pariahs. They are denied the right to form their own syndicate or professional union. They are also excluded from the syndicates of cinema workers, actors and musicians. They were looking for a home, and the SWPPMM magnanimously offered to take them in.

However, some have chosen to question both the union's motives and the justice of the advantages that will accrue to the belly-dancers as a result of their membership. The situation of the dancers is made more delicate by the fact that they are not alone in having taken advantage of the Syndicate's "open door" policy. Dozens of "third-rate" musicians, singers and bit-part players who failed to gain membership of their own syndicates have also been admitted to the SWPPMM, along with a number of journalists who were excluded from the Press Syndicate.

Not everyone is happy with such a catholic policy, which is seen as calling the more venerable professions represented into disrepute. In an article published by *Al-Ahram* last week, veteran writer and poet Farouk Guweida asked whether workers in the press and media should be lumped together with belly-dancers and marginal entertainers, whose actions are often frowned upon by the more conservative elements in society. For Guweida, the acceptance of belly-dancers into the syndicate is tantamount to acknowleging their *métier* as a respectable profession.

Nor is Guweida alone in his fears for the dignity of the press. "I cannot believe that I have been put on an equal footing with belly-dancers," complained Kamal El-Qadi, a journalist with the left-wing *Al-Ahali* newspaper. El-Qadi is one of a number of journalists who, having failed to acquire membership of the Press Syndicate, enrolled instead in the SWPPMM.

Nabil Baroudi, an official in the journalists' section of the syndicate, agrees: "This is an offense against syndicate members," he said. "Even workers should not be put in the same boat with belly-dancers." Baroudi had tried to block the enrollment of belly-dancers when the step was first taken, but failed.

Belly-dancers began joining the syndicate in 1995, reportedly with the official consent of the General Federation of Trade Unions. But the issue was not brought to light until the Ministry of Culture's censorship department — the authority in charge of providing belly-dancers with permits and regulating the profession — registered an official complaint about the syndicate's policy.

Farouk Salem, of the censorship department, said that issuing entertainers with syndicate membership cards would make it easier for them to commit "illegal actions" abroad, and so would reflect badly on Egypt's reputation. He also accused the syndicate of not investigating the background of those entertainers who were admitted to membership.

"We refuse to deal with the syndicate, because the syndicate has nothing to do with the entertainment industry," Salem said. "It should focus on serving workers. Most belly-dancers are businesswomen. Their enrollment is simply a tactic on the part of the syndicate to make money."

Selim Azouz, assistant chief editor at the opposition *Al-Ahrar* newspaper, said his paper had launched a campaign three years ago against allowing belly-dancers to join the syndicate. The newspaper claimed at the time that one famous dancer had offered LE20,000 in cash plus the refurbishment of the syndicate's headquarters at her own expense, in return for the decision to admit her and her co-workers.

"We also know of incidents in which certain belly-dancers and pseudo-artists have abused the privileges conferred by their membership card and have been caught engaging in illegal activities abroad," Azouz said. "But our warnings fell on deaf ears."

Sayed Abu Zeid, the Press Syndicate's lawyer, noted that the constitution entitles every professional category to have its own syndicate. "Nevertheless, the Syndicate for Workers in the Press, Printing and Mass Media has violated the syndicates' law by admitting entertainers, just as it has violated the law by providing journalists with cards which are similar in appearance to those issued by the Press Syndicate."

Fathi Abel-Aal, chairman of the SWPPMM, rejected all the charges levelled against the union, saying that the syndicate routinely opens its doors to as many as 20 different professions. Belly-dancers are enrolled in the "popular art" section, he said.

"We shouldn't bury our heads in the sand," Abdel-Aal said. "Entertainment is part of our lives — in theatres and cinemas, on television and at all sorts of social functions. There is no reason to be ashamed of providing these entertainers with some measure of credibility and insurance, especially since many of them are university graduates. Some of them even have master's degrees," he added.

Abdel-Aal insisted that the syndicate did investigate the background of its entertainer-members and that it would never support a member who engaged in illegal activities.

Advertisers to interact in Cairo

Preparations are in full swing for Cairo to host a congress of the International Advertising Association for the first time next month. **Rehab Saad** reports

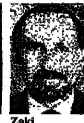


Hamdi





Zaklama



Zaki

International advertising agencies, media men and experts on information technology will take part in the biggest international advertising gathering to be held in Cairo for the first time next month. The 36th congress of the International Advertising Association (IAA) will take place between 10-13 May under the patronage of President Hosni Mubarak.

With the world standing on the threshhold of the third millenium, the principal theme of the congress will be "Interaction: the 21st century." More than 2,000 delegates from all over the world will debate the future of communication technologies and advertising strategies. Representatives of various information technology companies, such as Microsoft, Compaq, AT&T and others, will talk about the future of communication and interactive advertising and marketing. Experts will reveal the vast untapped potential of the Middle East and Africa, providing guidance on how to do business in the region.

But the congress will not only explore the horizons of the future, it will also look back towards the distant past. Delegates will have the opportunity to interact via satellite and video conferencing with prominent Egyptologists in Abu Simbel, the Giza Pyramids, the British Museum in London and the Louvre in Paris to uncover the secrets of ancient Egyptian civilisation.

"We are all working around the clock and preparations have almost been completed," said Loula Zaklama, the congress chairwoman. "The list of speakers is confirmed. Plans for the satellite conferencing have been finalised. Hotels and tourist buses are booked. Arrangements have been made for pre- and post-congress tours. And entertainment will be provided."

Zaklama added that a gala night will be hosted by the ministry of information at the Media Production City in the 6th of October City and other "Egyptian nights" will be held at the Pyramids and the Citadel. "We really have a good programme," she said.

According to Galal Zaki, secretary-general of the congress, it will be "the biggest gathering of those who work in the field of advertising, media, computers and printing. It is also the first time that an IAA congress is held in the Middle East and Africa. It is time to throw light on the importance of our region as far as advertising is concerned. In my opinion, the Middle East does not have its due share of advertising expenditures until now, although we have big industries and a large purchasing power."

The IAA congress is held every two years to provide a forum for debating the emerging marketing and communication issues and their consequences in a fast changing world. Due to its importance, countries across the world compete aggressively to host this congress. The winner earns a place on the world map, Zaklama said.

"The congress benefits the host country as far as economy, tourism and advertising are concerned," she explained. "This is why the competition is always tough. We fought for four years to host this congress and succeeded at last."

Zaklama said, "We had to convince the IAA board that we have the necessary facilities as well as the ability to organise the congress and provide a good programme. Because I am a member of the IAA since 1968 and know a lot of people, my job was to get the board's support. Then, a team of senior advertising professsionals, such as Tarek Nour and Hazem Der, did a very good presentation for Egypt. At the end, the competition was limited between us and Dubai. We won very closely."

Then came the Luxor massacre of last November and some delegate cancellations were reported. "Some people even suggested that the congress should be pulled out of Egypt," Zaki said. "We made a major effort to convince people that Egypt should remain the host. We toured Europe and talked to our friends everywhere, asking them to support us."

Zaklama said that the support of Arab countries was crucial. "They all gathered in Egypt and issued a report backing Egypt to be the host. They were all very supportive because this is a great opportunity to move the Middle East forward, where it deserves to be."

The important sessions of the congress will focus on interaction: past, present and future. Interaction past will explore the mysterious interactions of ancient Egyptian culture; that of the present will discuss interaction with the consumer through the new media of the information age; that of the future will try to draw an image of the future of interactive communications worldwide.

"These interaction sessions are being held for the first time ever," Zaklama said. "We will have the head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities standing at the pyramids and people from the USA will ask him questions via satellite. Similarly, officials at the Louvre and the British Museum will answer the delegates' questions. This never happened before."

These sessions, Zaklama added, will also discuss future issues, such as the boom which is taking place in the media and advertising, the Internet and advertising and the media in the 21st century. "Thus, these sessions will be dealing with things which happened 6,000 years ago and with the boom of the 21st century," she said.

On the last day of the congress, and on the occasion of the IAA's 60th anniversary, Mrs Suzanne Mubarak, Barry Day, creative director of the IAA, and Norman Vale, the IAA's director-general, will launch a "give a kid a hand" campaign, which is designed to promote the world's responsibility towards children.

The campaign will receive extensive coverage throughout the world, similar to the "Right to choose" campaign which was launched by the IAA in the past to promote the adveritising profession. "The new campaign will make every person everywhere responsible for helping a child in his/her community, even with a small thing, even with a hug," Zaklama said. "The campaign will be financed by the people of the profession. We gained a lot from this profession and it is time to give the world something back."

On the sidelines of the congress, an exhibition displaying the latest in the fields of information technology, telecommunications, multi-media and related industries will be held, as well as a bazaar displaying Khan El-Khalili handicrafts and Egyptian cotton casual wear.

The congress is organised by a number of major Egyptian media, advertising and tourism organisations, including, American Express, Look Advertising, Intermarkets and Al-Ahram, whose General Manager for Advertising, Hassan Hamdi, chairs the organising committee.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Waiting for Hamas

The Palestinian Authority has exonerated Israel from responsibility for the killing of Hamas military leader, Mohieddin Al-Sharif. Much will depend on Hamas' next move, writes Graham Usher from Jerusalem

The Israeli government is adamant that it had "no hand" in the death of Hamas military leader, Mohieddin Al-Sharif, whose dismembered corpse was found beside a wrecked car in Ramallah on 29 March. Once it became known that the victim was Al-Sharif — wanted by Israelis as the alleged "second engineer" behind the suicide operations that have rocked Israel in recent years — Israel has spared no channel to convey to Yasser Arafat that it was not involved and that the Palestinian Authority (PA) would be held "responsible" for any reprisals against Israelis by Hamas or its military arm, Ezzeddin Al-Qassam. Madeleine Albright too has reportedly told the Palestinian leader that "any terror attack now would destroy the peace process."

Arafat probably understands this better than Israel or the Americans. He is also aware that Israeli disclaimers and American warnings are likely to cut little ice with Palestinian public opinion.

On Thursday, thousands of Palestinians attended Al-Sharif's funeral in Al-Bireh, a Palestinian town next to Ramallah. Although Hamas supporters led the procession, many of those present were nationalists known for their support of the peace process, including the PLO's head of Jerusalem affairs, Faisal Al-Husseini. Yet he too appeared convinced that Israel was responsible. "Israel sent the Palestinians two messages last week. A message to Dennis Ross that there is no way to make progress in the peace process and that there will be no withdrawal *[from the West Bank]*. And a second message to Hamas that the war continues. The peace process cannot continue like this," concluded Al-Husseini.

Palestinian suspicions are aroused not only by the fact that Israel has been pursuing Al-Sharif for at least three years, but also by the manner of his death. The Israelis allege that Al-Sharif blew himself up while preparing explosives at a secret bomb factory in Ramallah. This is remarkably similar to the way Ezzeddin Al-Qassam leader Kamel Khalil met his death in Gaza in February 1995. Then, too, Israel claimed it was a "work accident" while Palestinians suspected it was an assassination.

There is also the report of the Palestinian pathologist who conducted the autopsy on Al-Sharif. He reportedly told Al-Sharif's brother that Mohieddin had been killed not by an explosion but by three bullet wounds to the chest and leg, suggesting that the killing was premeditated rather than accidental. Supporting this view, last week PA sources intimated that they believed Al-Sharif had been assassinated by "Palestinian collaborators" who had infiltrated Ezzeddin Al-Qassam. Hamas's spokesman in Amman, Ibrahim Ghosheh, also detected "a role for Palestinian collaborators" but said they were more likely to be "in the PA's security services" than in Ezzeddin Al-Qassam.

This week, however, the line changed — at least on the PA side. On Monday, the PA's presidential secretary, Tayeb Abdel-Rahim, announced that the PA had arrested five Palestinians for the murder of Al-Sharif. In an interview with BBC Radio, the PA's West Bank head of Preventive Security, Jibril Rajoub, confirmed that all five "were affiliated to Hamas, though they were not loyal or faithful to the Hamas movement."

Another PA security official was quoted as saying that "all the suspects were from Al-Sharif's inner circle" (i.e. from Ezzeddin Al-Qassam). "It was apparently an internal struggle in Hamas. They all confessed," he added. The Palestinian security official claimed that Adel Awadallah, another top Hamas military leader, had murdered the group's master bomb-maker in a power struggle. Awadallah escaped arrest and is being hunted by Palestinian police. He was allegedly named as Al-Sharif's murderer by Ghassan Adasi, a Hamas militant, with whom Al-Sharif was living and who was arrested by Palestinian police hours after the militant's body was found. Adasi confessed to being present when Awadallah shot Al-Sharif, the security source told Agence France Presse (AFP).

If true, this account would exonerate Israel and the PA from any part in Al-Sharif's slaying. Yet it is an explanation that will almost certainly be rejected by Hamas. Indeed, it has been rejected already.

"Netanyahu is lying when he tells the world that Al-Sharif was assassinated as a result of inner strife within Hamas," Hamas political leader, Aziz Rantisi, told a rally at Gaza's Islamic University on Saturday. "We will tell this Jew [Netanyahu] that we Muslims do not murder one another like Yigal Amir murdered Yitzhak Rabin. We know who murdered Al-Sharif and we will hunt him everywhere."

The fact that the PA's official account of Al-Sharif's killing now seems to coincide with Netanyahu's is unlikely to lessen Hamas's suspicions. Nor is it likely to avert Hamas's expected response, also outlined by Rantisi on Saturday. "Ezzeddin Al-Qassam must make good its threats," he said, referring to a Qassam statement issued last week which vowed to "avenge" Al-Sharif's death on a scale that will "exceed that launched after Ayyash was assassinated."

Yehia Ayyash was the "first engineer", allegedly responsible for a wave of suicide attacks inside Israel in 1994 and 1995. Following his certain Israeli sponsored death in Gaza in 1996, Ezzeddin Al-Qassam responded with suicide attacks in Jerusalem and Ashkelon that left 45 Israelis dead, brought the peace process to its knees and effectively lost the elections for Shimon Peres's Labour Party.

With Netanyahu and Likud in power, Arafat is aware that any repeat of such vengeance will draw consequences even more mortal for the Oslo process. The PA's conclusion that Al-Sharif was killed by members of his own movement, if true, is thus a denouement that will be welcomed by Israel and Arafat alike. But, if Hamas rejects this conclusion, then the likelihood is that "revenge" will still be the price of Al-Sharif's death for the Israelis. As for the political consequences of such retaliation, this, almost certainly, will be the PA's price to pay.



Thousands of Palestinian mourners attend the funeral of Hamas leader Mohieddin Al-Sharif in the West Bank town of Al-Bireh. The banner lifted by the demonstrators reads: "To the Shabak (Israeli secret service): We vow to die as martyrs and to bury your remains" *(photo: AFP)*

Iran's conservatives strike back

The jailing of a prominent ally to the moderate Iranian president could spark a full-scale power struggle, writes Safa Haeri

The arrest of Qolam Hossein Karbaschi, the controversial yet charismatic 46-year-old mayor of Tehran, has developed into an open fight between the executive and the judiciary branches of the Islamic Republic, controlled respectively by the new president, Ayatollah Mohammad Khatami and the leader of the regime, the all-powerful Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Karbaschi, a staunch supporter of the president, was arrested early Saturday morning, the first working day after the long Iranian New Year holiday, after being summoned for "routine questioning" about ongoing corruption charges and embezzlement of public funds.

The executive branch — led by Khatami — has jumped to Karbaschi's defense. At the end of a marathon 6-hour debate chaired by Khatami, the council of ministers expressed Sunday its "regrets" at Karbaschi's detention and its full support for the man it described as a "distinguished and outstanding mayor".

The government also protested the methods employed by the judiciary to detain and imprison Karbaschi and expressed its hope that his detention would not last more than one month.

But the judiciary claims that they have enough evidence to start trial proceedings against the mayor, whom they accuse of embezzling public funds, massive corruption and abuse of power.

Sources close to the cabinet told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the support for Karbaschi was "unanimous" and that, at Khatami's suggestion, a copy of the minutes of the cabinet meeting will be forwarded to Khamenei. "This indicates that Mr Khatami wants the leader to be personally and directly informed of his displeasure at the judiciary's action," the source commented.

Analysts in Tehran said Khatami's unequivocal support for Karbaschi pits the government and the executive branch against the judiciary, which is directly controlled by Khamenei and acts as his political arm to silence his opponents.

Karbaschi is not an ordinary mayor. He sits among ministers in the cabinet councils, runs the nation's most popular newspaper, *Hamshahrii* (Town Men), and is one of the founders of the "Servants of Construction" - a political grouping established by former president Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. This group played a crucial role in supporting Khatami during the presidential race against Parliament Speaker Ayatollah Nateq Nouri late last year. Nouri enjoyed the support of Khamenei and the ruling conservative clergymen.

Observers speculate that Khamenei has not forgiven Karbaschi for the role his newspaper played in Khatami's surprise victory. The defeat of Nouri was interpreted as a humiliating slap for Khamenei and a rejection of his hard-line policies.

By arresting the mayor of Tehran, the conservatives are in fact targeting the president himself, observers say. Fa'ezeh Rafsanjani, MP for Tehran and younger daughter of the former president, said, "The detention of Mr. Karbaschi is a blow to freedom and democracy in Iran."

Even the clergy is divided on the subject of Karbaschi. Among the senior clergymen who publicly defended the mayor was Ayatollah Taheri, Imam of Esfahan in central Iran, where Karbaschi started his mayoral career before moving to Tehran 10 years ago. Taheri stated that Karbaschi's detention was purely political and had nothing to do with corruption and embezzlement.

Analysts predict that, with Karbaschi in jail, the conservatives' next targets will be Khatami's two other main allies in driving Tehran towards a more moderate policy: the Interior Minister Hojat Al-Islam Abdullah Nouri and Culture Minister Ataollah Mohajerani.

This view is echoed by many residents of Tehran, who feel the weakening right-wing faction is mounting a "bloodless coup" against the president.

"What do you do when tearing down a house? You start with the pillars," said a female Tehran University student. "This is the strategy of Mr. Khamenei and his associates. Today Karbaschi, tomorrow Nouri and Mohajerani, and ending with Khatami himself."

The next few days will determine where Iran is headed in the future. Only Khamenei has the power to order the release of the mayor before the end of his mandatory one-month detention period.

If Karbaschi is set free, this will mean that Khatami has succeeded in persuading the leader to back off. That would be viewed as a tremendous victory over the conservatives, and a sign that he is the real boss in Tehran.

On the other hand, if Karbaschi remains in prison, it will be a great set-back for Khatami, who stands to lose the confidence the people have placed in him to create a civil society, grant greater social freedoms and steer Iran out of its international isolation.

Lebanon debates Syrian connection

Beirut rejected Israel's latest offer for conditional withdrawal from south Lebanon. But, as Zeina Khodr reports from the Lebanese capital, the Israeli move brought the question of Syrian influence in Lebanon back in the limelight

The Israeli cabinet's conditional approval of 20-year-old UN Resolution 425 was dismissed by Lebanon as "nothing new". The cabinet tied the approval to certain security guarantees from Lebanon, but Beirut said it would not hold any negotiations since 425 called for an immediate and unconditional Israeli pullback.

Suggestions circulated that Lebanon could do little else because of Syria's powerful influence and its insistence on linking the Syrian and Lebanese peace tracks. Thus, to Syria, withdrawal from south Lebanon should be accompanied by a similar Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. But the international community has urged the two sides to sit down at the negotiating table.

Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri, who stressed that there would be no security without a comprehensive peace, said Lebanon would only cooperate on border security arrangements if Israel signed a peace treaty with Beirut and Damascus and withdrew from occupied lands.

"Israel, Lebanon, and Syria would cooperate in many fields including security if peace is reached. All of us would be part of it. So we would be one camp against those who do not want peace," Al-Hariri said. "Lebanon has no commitment to security or anything else to Israel and 425 must be implemented without conditions or negotiations. If Israel wants Lebanon's cooperation in securing the border it must first make peace with Lebanon and Syria," he added.

Government officials believe Israel is conducting a diplomatic offensive to promote a "security before peace" settlement and to overcome world criticism of its failure to implement agreements already signed with the Palestinians. They are also accusing Israel of attempting to separate the Lebanese and Syrian peace tracks.

Lebanon also objects to Israeli conditions concerning the future of the South Lebanon Army (SLA) led by Antoine Lahd. Israel wants to integrate the 2,500-man militia into the Lebanese army and to pardon its members who cooperated with the occupation army since the creation of the so-called "security zone" in south Lebanon in 1978. Beirut said this an internal matter and that the SLA members were "traitors" who deserved to be punished.

Some politicians and analysts, however, believe the Israeli offer, which has put pressure on Beirut, may not be a manoeuvre and that the Lebanese government has failed to provide a credible response.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and UN Chief Kofi Annan welcomed Israel's decision and called it significant. "Israel is pushing Lebanon into a corner," said former Lebanese ambassador to the US, Simon Karam. "Now Lebanon is under pressure to come up with its own plan. The Lebanese have responded with no diplomacy at all, ruining their credibility."

On the other hand, analysts like Paul Salem, director of the Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies, believes Israel has a lack of solid support for its proposal. "Most [people] understand the Lebanese position and are not encouraging a development on one track only," he said. Both Annan and British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook have admitted that there is a Syrian angle which cannot be ignored. Syria is the main power broker in Lebanon, and Beirut moves on peace-making in tandem with its neighbour.

Lebanese Information Minister Bassem Saba said the Israeli proposal was a propaganda bid to portray Lebanon as a Syrian puppet. "The truth is that both Lebanon and Syria are in the same danger and are fighting one battle," he said. "Both countries hold one card: the card of liberating Lebanese territories and the Syrian-occupied Golan."

Analysts believe Israel is not interested in resuming talks over the Golan Heights and only wants to resolve the south Lebanon issue because its occupation has proved costly. They add that Damascus wants to regain the strategic Golan, captured by Israel in 1967, and has little interest in reducing the pressure on Israeli forces in south Lebanon.

"There is an assumption that Syria is tightly controlling the Lebanese decision," said political analyst Michael Young.

According to Israeli analysts, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has boosted his standing whether or not the withdrawal takes place. "He won a public relations battle. It is only talk and public relations, but nothing tangible will come out of it unless Netanyahu takes some hard decisions about the Golan and he is not the fellow to do that," Moshe Maoz was quoted by Reuters as saying.

The Lebanese army, describing Israel's conditions as unprecedented, said Israel "would be mistaken if it believed the government would allow the army to become a border police for the Jewish state while the two countries were still at war."

Foreign Minister Fares Boueiz called the offer a "bluff" and said, "Israel is trying to show the world it is ready to implement the resolution, but it added many conditions. Its real goal is to destroy 425."

While the Israeli offer is being viewed with suspicion, many are warning that Israel may strike at Lebanon to force it into accepting its conditions. "The plan aims at striking at south Lebanon," said Lebanese House Speaker Nabih Berri.

Israel's Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai warned that Lebanon would suffer the consequences of rejecting the offer.

Sayed Hassan Nasrallah, secretary-general of Hizbullah, the group spearheading the resistance war in the south, said Israel made its offer to save itself from an increasingly costly occupation. "It would have never recognised 425 without the resistance," he said. Hizbullah has refused to say whether it would stop attacks if Israel withdraws. "This is our point of strength," Nasrallah said.

Mayhem in Somalia

As fighting resumes and hundreds of refugees drown while trying to flee, observers see no end in sight for the Somali crisis, writes Gamal Nkrumah

The tragedy of Somali boat people fleeing their war-torn homeland continues amid reports of renewed eruption of tribal and clan fighting in many parts of Somalia. The fiercest fighting is reported in the strategic southern port of Kismayo. Marehan tribesmen under the leadership of General Omar Haji Mohamed are engaged in fierce battle with Majerten tribesmen under the leadership of General Mohamed Said Hirsi popularly known as "Morgan".

The irony is that both the Majerten and Marehan clans, vying for control of Kismayo, belong to the large Darod tribe. They both fought a bitter war with the late General Mohamed Farah Aidid, and repulsed his bid to capture Kismayo in 1991.

The assistant Egyptian foreign minister for African affairs, Mohamed Shaaban, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Egypt was against the "Balkanisation of Somalia." He also affirmed that Egypt is committed to working closely with all of Somalia's neighbours to ensure peace and political stability. Shaaban dismissed rumours that Egypt is competing for political primacy in Somalia and the Horn of Africa.

Ethiopia and other member states of the Inter-Governmental Agency for Drought and Development (IGADD) are apprehensive about Egyptian attempts to foster peace and reconciliation between the warring Somali factions. The Ethiopians are jealous over earlier initiatives for Somali reconciliation that they began two years ago, culminating in a conference of Somali reconciliation convened in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa in January 1997. Observers believe that Addis Ababa objects to being upstaged by Egyptian initiatives. But both Egyptian and Ethiopian officials deny that there is any rivalry between the two countries for domination of Somalia and the Horn. Egypt acknowledges the importance of the Ethiopian-led IGADD initiative and sees Cairo's role as complementary to IGADD's efforts at ensuring peace and reconciliation. "Cairo provided the venue for the Somali reconciliation meeting, but Egypt has no desire to interfere in the internal affairs of the Somali people and leadership," asserted Shaaban.

A national reconciliation meeting scheduled for February was initially postponed to 31 March but was recently postponed again. Faction leaders, who agreed at a conference in Cairo last December to meet in the disputed central Somali town of Baidoa, are now meeting to set a new date. Hussein Mohamed Aidid and Ali Mahdi Mohamed, the two main Somali factional leaders who control the Somali capital Mogadishu and considerable territory in the southern and central parts of the country, said recently in a letter to Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid that they need $4.5 million to convene the Baidoa conference. For his part, Abdel-Meguid urged Arab countries to provide the Somalis with the necessary funds. The Arab League has to date only received $400,000 from Qatar and $100,000 from Kuwait for Somalia — a sum which falls far short of that demanded by Somalia's factional leaders.

The renewed fighting in Kismayo coincided with another human tragedy in which more than 180 Somalis trying to flee their country to Yemen by boat reportedly died after their vessel sank in the Arabian Sea. Amiang Kingsley Opoku, chief representative in Yemen for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, said American Marines in the Arabian Sea recovered the bodies of 34 people, including 24 women, one child and nine men. The bodies are believed to be among the casualties of the vessel that sank last week carrying 188 Somalis which left the Somali port of Bossasso on 25 March.

"There is a flourishing, albeit illegal, business in trafficking Somalis. Women and children are dropped off before they reach the shores of Yemen. People are thrown overboard and many drown. Boats filled with people and illegal crew cross the Arabian Sea in vessels that are not seaworthy. Passengers, who pay between $50-$100 for the hazardous journey, are thrown overboard just before the Yemeni coast," Opoku explained.

Edited by **Khaled Dawoud**



King's legacy lives on

AFRICAN American former civil rights leader and President Bill Clinton's special Africa envoy, Jesse Jackson, commemorated on Saturday the 30th anniversary of the death of American civil rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr. — who was shot to death on his motel room balcony in Memphis, Tennessee, on 4 April 1968.

The reason Martin Luther King made his fateful visit to Memphis in the first place was to denounce the appalling working conditions of the ciry's black sanitation workers. Today, Memphis has a black mayor, a black member of Congress, a black member of the local school system and a black police chief.

A special day of commemoration for African Americans, 4 April was marked with special vigils held all over the country paying tribute to the man who led the non-violent civil rights campaign against racial segregation in the US.

The commemorations to mark the 30th anniversary of Martin Luther King's assassination have been overshadowed by demands for an inquiry into claims that he was the victim not of a solitary gunman, as the authorities have always maintained, but of a sinister conspiracy involving the mafia and the FBI.

(photos: AFP)





Western trade trumps Eastern rights

At the second Asia-Europe Meeting in London, Asian nations were once again drawn into the thankless game of geopolitics *à l'Européenne*, writes Gamal Nkrumah

In March 1996, Thailand hosted the first Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Last week, as US President Bill Clinton was triumphantly ending a historic tour of Africa, his European counterpart, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, played host to ASEM 2. At the two-day meeting, leaders from the two continents pledged to forge ever closer ties.

There were, of course, many nice photo opportunities for all. Comparisons were inevitably made with the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. APEC brings together the Americas, Asia and Australia. But ASEM cannot hope to act as a counterweight to APEC, of which America is part. For one thing, ASEM was never envisaged as a formal economic forum, like APEC, with a permanent secretariat. Indeed, it was agreed in Bangkok in 1996 that, "as an informal process, ASEM need not be institutionalised."

ASEM is just another forum where East meets West and the West behaves as if it were the arbiter of truth. Western perspectives continue to exert a powerful influence over political and economic developments in Asia and Africa. Can these continents ever deliver a definitive riposte to Western political and economic hegemony?

Asian-European partnership should presumably be based on the mutual exploration of the many dimensions of Asian-European cultural relations. Yet instead, today, we have empty talking shops which do nothing save provide political expression for that body of opinion defined as liberal, including the dogmatic creed of economic liberalisation.

The Asian economic miracle failed to advance the political and socio-cultural aspirations of the least well-off segment of the population. Some still claim that it expanded the underdogs' economic horizons, but newly-industrialised Asian countries have some of the highest known disparities of income in the world.

Only 36 per cent of Asians are provided with adequate sanitation. Only 56 per cent of Africa's population have access to safe potable water. Only 46 per cent of the continent's people have access to adequate sanitation, while purchasing power parity per capita income is a mere $1,961, compared to $3,565 for Asia, $13,134 for Europe and $26,389 for America.

So what's new? In spite of the questionable claims to success of Asian crony capitalism and corruption, little has changed from colonial times. South and East Asia, excluding Japan, account for just over half of the world's labour force. But Non-Japan Asia trade accounts for less than 7 per cent of world trade, while African trade constitutes less than two per cent of the total.

The world is unfair. Now the International Monetary Fund has ridden to the rescue of the developing world. At ASEM, Europe urged Asia to follow the IMF's prescription for recovery, avoiding protectionism and adopting open, "credible" financial systems. Europeans, of course, are the IMF's biggest shareholders.

Can Asia, let alone Africa, ever redress the imbalance? The Western world's verdict is a resounding "No". If they are to survive at all as socio-cultural, political and economic entities, they must comply with Western values.

In such a perspective, it is clear that ASEM will only become a serious player in world politics if the Asian economies start to play by Western rules, as Gerald Segal, director of the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies, recently argued in the *Financial Times*. Yet this perspective is itself biased, seeing cultural values as the battleground that will determine international political and economic supremacy. As such, it is redolent of Samuel Huntington's theory of "the Clash of Civilisations". The seeds of an unequal relationship were sown long ago.

Today, few can say that the chessboard has changed. Europeans still live in a different historical time zone — one where Westerners who love to sound off about so-called "Asian values" call the shots. Malaysia's plan for an exclusive East Asian Economic Caucus was given the thumbs down. In retaliation, Australian and New Zealand membership of ASEM was vetoed by Malaysia. India and Pakistan, too, were denied membership of ASEM. Neither Russia nor Turkey, the two most Eurasian of countries, are ASEM members.

As Asia grapples with financial crisis, Europe is insisting that neo-liberal orthodoxy is the only way to develop Asia's full economic potential and improve its international political standing. Behind this patent remedy lies a simple truth: neither European leaders nor European public opinion has confidence in Asian governments.

Trade always trumps human rights in Europe's dealings with Asia, and the latest gathering in London of 15 European and 10 Asian heads of state and government was no exception. Prickly issues like the child sex trade and drug-trafficking barely made it to the agenda, while democratisation and human rights issues hardly got a mention. Suharto, too busy putting his aging shoulder to the wheel at home, did not make the journey, sending his Vice President BJ Habibie instead. The Indonesian currency, the rupiah, has seen its value plunge by around 70 per cent in recent months, and social unrest in the archipelago is close to boiling point.

Demonstrators led deafening protests against the Chinese and Indonesian occupation of Tibet and East Timor respectively. Social activists vociferously denounced both Asian and European leaders for neglecting the plight of the poor and issues of human rights. The Asia-Europe Peoples Forum issued a strongly-worded statement expressing deep concern that democracy and human rights were not at the centre of ASEM 2's agenda. "We fear that the economic agreements struck at ASEM 2 are at the expense of the immediate and long-term welfare and rights of ordinary people," charged a spokeswoman for the Catholic Institute for International Relations. The forum believes that IMF policies have intensified poverty and increased the hardship of ordinary Asians.

But are there still good times ahead, even for those who are not poor? Economic indicators are far from encouraging. Thailand, Indonesia and South Korea have all received IMF bailouts. Malaysian Premier Mahathir Mohamed insisted that the final financial statement included a reference to "speculation-induced instability". Last year, Mohamed accused financier George Soros of deliberately triggering the sudden depreciation of Malaysia's currency, the ringgit. Political sniping makes headlines.

Thai premier Chuan Leekpai told reporters in London that poor export performance has slowed down Thailand's economic recovery following last July's devaluation of the national currency, the baht. "The major problem we are facing with regard to exports is that of liquidity. The banks are charging high interest rates, and some banks do not have the funds to make loans," Chuan explained.

Asia needs a breathing space to put its economic house in order. Europe, unfortunately, is in no position to help. It is hardly surprising that many Asians see Europeans as strictly fair-weather friends. Japan gave about $20 billion in assistance to jittery Southeast Asian economies such as Thailand and Indonesia. Europe has given no more than $6.25 billion — all to a single country, South Korea.

South Korean President Kim Dae-jung, one of Asia's most determined campaigners for democracy and human rights, sang the praises of his European benefactors. "If we had taken the path of democracy earlier, we could have avoided our current problems. We have serious problems such as unemployment with 1.5 million workers out of work. And interest rates must be lowered from 20 per cent, which is causing 100 companies to go bankrupt a day, along with 10,000 workers losing their jobs daily. We have a lot to learn from Europe: democracy and economic development should go hand in hand," he explained. Flattering his British hosts, Kim Dae-jung added, "The UK went through the same experience as Korea with the IMF, and they were successfully able to learn something from the experience." Small wonder, ASEM 3, scheduled for the year 2000, is to be held in the South Korean capital of Seoul.

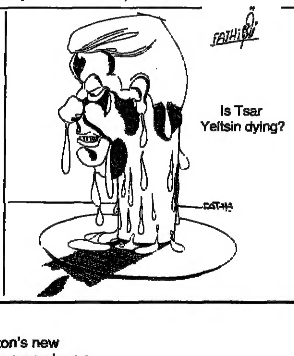


Libyan pilgrims defy UN sanctions





Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi



Is Tsar Yeltsin dying?

Big-game hunting, big-time

President Clinton's new African trade law promises a lucrative win-win partnership with African nations. But Faiza Rady asks if 'NAFTRICA' will serve the interests of US companies at the expense of African infrastructure and economic development

Having completed a whirlwind tour of six African countries amidst strident media fanfare (and with a special wink to his African American constituency back home), US President Bill Clinton appeared set to emerge as the continent's new champion and — in the words of African American *Time* magazine columnist Jack E. White — an honourary black man, to boot.

"This is a President who connects with blacks so strongly that some of us jokingly maintain that he's only passing for white," raved White.

In Africa, an oftentimes demure Clinton made some obligatory and calculated mea culpa noises in the right directions: apologising profusely for American slavery, historical complicity with the apartheid regime in South Africa, and more recently complacent non-intervention in the Rwandan genocide, among other sins.

But beyond the evident theatrics and politically correct discourse, Clinton arrived in Africa hailing the vision of a new "partnership" between the continent and the US, enshrined in the African Growth and Opportunity Act — a bill calling for "increased US trade with and investment in African nations". An expanded and refined version of NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement, to which Canada, the US and Mexico are signatories) and thus appropriately dubbed NAFTRICA on the continent, the African Growth and Opportunity Act was passed with a bipartisan majority in the US Congress on 11 March and is expected to be ratified by the Senate this month.

Proposing to promote African exports to the US and US investments in Africa, the Act imposes investment conditionality on the familiar neo-liberal medley: increased economic liberalisation and privatisation of the public sector; removal of remaining trade and tariff barriers; removal of most forms of government subsidies — especially in the agricultural sector; equal treatment of national and American investors, including equal US corporate access to land and natural resources; considerable reduction of corporate taxation and provision of unrestrained cross-border transfer of capital, goods and services.

Moreover, the bill demands "control of government consumption", a euphemism for health and social security spending. As an additional postscript, the bill also dogmatically requires African governments to establish democratic rule and improve their human rights records.

Delivering his message with a calculated dosage of craftsmanship and aplomb, Clinton assured African leaders that "the US stands ready to be a partner in Africa's prosperity," based on the bill's neo-liberal formula. Echoing Clinton's discourse, Susan Rice, the assistant secretary of state for African affairs, chirped that "Africans are taking their seats at the global economic table and arriving with hearty appetites for lucrative commercial dealings."

Despite the Clinton administration's relentless propaganda effort, many Africans and African Americans bluntly denounced the US proposal. Most prominent among them, South African President Nelson Mandela derisively dismissed the "ambitious and extensive" American trade agenda coming at a time when the US is actively standing in the way of providing debt relief to Africa's least-developed countries — which pay more than 80 per cent of their average GNPs in prohibitive debt interest servicing. Mandela also denounced the bill for linking US investment in Africa to adherence to International Monetary Fund (IMF) demands.

Signifying his global rejection of US policies in the South, Mandela made a point at a joint press conference in Cape town of singing the praises of Cuba, Iran and Libya — all countries high on Clinton's list of so-called rogue states. "Not only did they support us in rhetoric, they gave us the resources for us to conduct the struggle and win," said Mandela, adding in the general direction of the contrite but still smiling US President that those who disagreed were free "to go and throw themselves into a pool."

The African press also lambasted Clinton for pushing his corporate agenda on the debt-ridden, famine-stricken continent, while touting the praises of the market economy. "No share for the poor in US bounty", headlined the South African daily *Mail & Guardian* writing that NAFTRICA spelled the same economic havoc that NAFTA brought to Mexico. "NAFTA has led to widespread collapse of small and medium-sized businesses in Mexico, massive lay-offs, crippling currency devaluation, a flood of cheap food undercutting local production and escalating political and social conflict since its passage in 1993."

In the US, the American federation of trade unions, AFL-CIO, issued a statement denouncing the bill for promoting big business interests at the expense of workers' rights. "[The Africa Growth and Opportunity Act] is conspicuously silent on the protection of core labour rights or the environment... [Its] criteria do more to address narrow business concerns than to establish a sound foundation for independent development strategies," read the statement explaining that the bill's investment conditionality specifically locks sub-Saharan countries into a "failed and outdated development model."

In effect, many analysts believe that Clinton's package offers nothing new in terms of development prospects, but extends a more rigourous version of World Bank and IMF loan requirements to maximise the profits of US-based transnationals. "To be sure, America's heightened interest in Africa may bring certain short-term and other benefits to African economies. The real issue, however, is how the series of interventions and the reforms they call for will affect Africa's national and regional economic capacity," wrote Tetteh Hormeku, a Ghanaian economist with the Accra-based Third World Network.

While the neo-classical dogma decrees that privatisation will by sheer definition increase efficiency and profits and thereby expand production and productivity to where it is most needed, experience has demonstrated that this is not necessarily the case. "Take investment in financial services, which in African economies have been primarily related to import-export at the expense of local investment," Hormeku told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "With privatisation, mainstream investment financing has moved even further away from supporting domestic rural and urban production networks, essentially because the import-export business is more profitable."

The privatised infrastructure sector highlights another dimension of the same problem, explained Hormeku. Beyond linking urban metropolises, most African road and rail networks only connect primary commodity export locations, like mines, to the ports. US-style privatised toll roads are likely to amplify this trend since the most profitable lines will be precisely those connecting export production bases to their exit route, at the expense of regional and national transport requirements. In the case of the highly coveted infrastructure sector as in other instances, the US-imposed privatisation model will naturally bypass people's development needs in favour of high profit-yielding export-oriented ventures.

April is the cruelest month

Exactly fifty years ago today, thousands of Arab guerrilla fighters assembled at Al-Aqsa Mosque to honour their charismatic leader, Abdel-Qadir Al-Husseini, who had been shot the day before at the battle of Al-Kastel. There would be more burials to come. As the men prayed over the body of their dead commander, a full-scale carnage was unfolding barely three miles from the spot where he had died — the massacre of 254 Arab civilians at the village of Deir Yassin. At the beginning of April, the Haganah launched Plan Dalet, seeking first to occupy and demolish villages along the

The making of a martyr

When Abdel-Qadir Al-Husseini fell at Al-Kastel, his death seemed to mark the beginning of the end for the Arabs in Palestine. Some historians even claim that had the Arabs not lost this battle, there might be no Jewish state today. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reflects on the career of a legendary hero

The funeral of Abdel-Qadir Al-Husseini, at Al-Aqsa Mosque, on Friday 9 April

"A military commander and a Palestinian fighter." This is the description of Abdel-Qadir Al-Husseini in information file number 3101 in the archives of *Al-Ahram* newspaper. Abu Mousa, Abdel-Qadir Al-Husseini, is acknowledged in there as the Palestinian commander most committed to the cause which he gave his life for.

Abdel-Qadir was born in Jerusalem in 1908 to Mousa Kazem *pacha* Al-Husseini, one of the pioneer commanders who led the early struggle in Palestine from 1919 to 1933 and was elected to chair the first Arab Conference in Jerusalem in 1919. The young boy witnessed from an early age the battles against the British mandate rule, which acted as an eye-opener, initiating him into the true situation of Palestine at the time.

Right up to the end of his life, Mousa Kazem Pacha, despite his considerable age (he was 83 when he died in 1934), still took to the streets, organising protests against the British Army's connivance with the Zionist movement who were actively colonising Palestine. In one of those demonstrations in Jaffa, Mousa was attacked by a British soldier and seriously injured. He was pronounced dead on 23 March 1934. Abdel-Qadir, by then, was old enough to follow in his father's footsteps. In that same demonstration, the young man had been among the injured. As he later recalled, "the slogans of the protest called for the 'fall of Zionism' and of Britain which protected it."

Al-Husseini was educated at *Roudat Al-Ma'aref Al-Watanyia* in Jerusalem. Most wealthy Palestinian families at the time would send their sons to complete their higher education in Egypt, and Al-Husseini was duly dispatched to Cairo, where he entered the American University in Cairo, majoring in history and journalism.

He graduated with honours in 1934, the first ever Palestinian student to receive such a degree from the AUC. Describing the scene 25 years later in a profile of Al-Husseini, *Al-Messa* newspaper of 15 May 1959 (edited at the time by Anouar Saddat) reported that the young man had addressed the audience, telling them, "This university is but a colonial and missionary establishment. It is also a base for the enemies of the Arabs. To express my protest at the existence of such a place in the heart of Cairo, I will tear up this degree... This university aims to destroy the pillars of Islam and Arabism and to turn young Arabs into voices of colonialism." This account is probably highly exaggerated, yet similar stories appear in many of the sources for his life.

Whether he gave the long speech reproduced in *Al-Messa*, or just shouted "Long live Palestine," as other sources claim, the incident itself is indicative of both the climate that prevailed in the thirties and the legends that were woven around Husseini's name much later. Upon returning to Palestine, Al-Husseini turned down a job with the British mandate authorities in the Land Settlement Circle, a body which was to oversee the settlement of land disputes between Arabs and Jews. To his dismay, Al-Husseini realised that his job as an assistant to the settlement chief was effectively to hand the land of Arab families over to their Jewish rivals.

In 1936, Al-Husseini took part in the Palestinian revolution. As commander of Al-Jiha Al-Mouqadas (Sacred Jihad) troops in Palestine, he was delegated the authority to declare war against the British mandate authorities, which he did on 7 May. The revolution began with systematic attacks on British troops stationed in Jerusalem and its environs. The enemy sustained heavy losses, which provoked the British authorities to lay ambushes to try and hunt down Al-Husseini. Despite their efforts, he managed to escape unscathed. The revolution reached its peak in July of the same year when the remaining forces of Ezz El-Din Al-Qassam joined the ranks of Al-Husseini along with scores of fighters from around the Arab world. After a series of attacks in Ramallah, Jericho, Bethlehem and Bab El-Wad, the British troops managed to lay siege to the village of El-Khodr, and Al-Husseini was captured in a fierce battle. Seriously wounded, he was transferred under heavy guard to the military hospital. While the British authorities awaited his recovery to put him on trial, Abdel-Qadir's comrades attacked the hospital and spirited Al-Husseini away to Damascus, where he remained for three months to complete his treatment.

In response to a plea from the Arab kings and the Arab Supreme Committee for Palestine, the revolution was then brought to an abrupt halt, after the British authorities promised to consider their demands.

By the end of 1937, Al-Husseini was back in Palestine. He was stationed in Beirzeit, which was to be the headquarters of the second stage of the holy Jihad against British occupation and Jewish immigration. A few months later, the fighters had taken the old city of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, Jericho and Ramallah, as well as scores of villages. Faced with such considerable victories, the British troops moved to crush the revolution. While Al-Husseini was moving towards the coast to attack Jewish settlements in the Beit Gebrin area, he came under fire from British artillery and was so severely injured that he was counted among the dead. Yet, somehow, he managed to resurface in Damascus, where he again received treatment for his wounds. Shortly afterwards, the Second World War broke out and the Palestinian revolution came to a halt once again.

Al-Husseini moved on to Baghdad where he joined the military officers' college. In 1941 he supported the revolution of Rashid Ali Al-Kilani against the British Army and, as a result, was arrested and put on military trial, where he was sentenced to three year's imprisonment. At the end of the Second World War, Al-Husseini reappeared in Cairo, where he was hard at work preparing the next stage of armed struggle in Palestine. He began by training Palestinian youths in guerrilla warfare. While thus occupied with purchasing arms and training the young soldiers of the holy Jihad in Cairo, he also met with a number of the nationalist officers in the Egyptian Army to agree on goals for the Palestinian fighters. The Mufti declared him the commander of the holy Jihad. Thus made ready, Al-Husseini moved back to Palestine after nearly a decade's absence. His return coincided with the declaration of the November 1947 UN resolution on the partition of Palestine.

As clashes between Arabs and Jews intensified on the eve of the establishment of the Jewish state, Zionist guerrilla gangs resorted to terrorism against the Arabs by planting bombs in Arab quarters. Abdel-Qadir and his men engaged in a series of battles against these gangs in *Beit Sourek, Beit Mehiaser, Berk Suliman, Sourif*, Ramallah and other villages. Having run out of weaponry, their commander then headed to Damascus, the headquarters of the Arab Liberation Army (the army of irregulars formed by the Arab League), to seek ammunition and mortar cover.

In Damascus, Al-Husseini did his best to describe the deteriorating situation in Palestine and how the Jews were becoming more influential every day. He went on to explain how the Jewish guerrillas were well-equipped while the Palestinian fighters didn't lack courage, but had no weapons save old Ottoman guns.

It was while Al-Husseini was making his plea for help, that the battle of Al-Kastel broke out. The village of Al-Kastel, west of Jerusalem, was to be occupied under the first phase of Plan Dalet, whose goal was to capture the villages along the Tel-Aviv-Jerusalem Road from local Palestinian militia. According to many Arab historians, the battle of Al-Kastel was one of the decisive battles — if not *the* decisive battle — of the 1948 war. It was the battle which determined the possibility of the Jewish state. Both the Arab fighters and the Jewish terrorists realised the strategic importance of the village. Whoever controlled Al-Kastel could control Jerusalem and the ammunition road linking the Jewish settlements with both Tel-Aviv and Jaffa, as well as the Palestinian coast. That is why the battle turned into one of the fiercest and bloodiest encounters of that time — a prelude to the atrocities committed in Deir Yassin a day later.

In his book, *The Struggle of the Palestinian People*, the writer and journalist Ahmed Boyassir explains that the response of the Arab League military committee to Al-Husseini's request for arms simply reflected the policies of the countries they represented.

"During this time, news broke that Al-Kastel had fallen into the hands of the Jews. Al-Husseini was outraged by the news and addressed Taha Pacha Al-Hashemi, former general commander of the Iraqi Army and chief inspector of the Arab Liberation Army, in these terms: 'Al-Kastel is a strong fortress which we cannot hope to get back with the little ammunition we have. Give me the weapons that I ask for and I will recapture it.' Al-Husseini's request was refused. His final words to those who denied him arms were, 'History will record that you made the loss of Palestine possible. I will go back to Kastel even if I die with all my comrades.' He was killed a day later at Al-Kastel."

Following his death, *Al-Ahram*'s Jerusalem correspondent wrote:

"The killing of the late Abdel-Qadir Al-Husseini, the commander-in-chief of Jerusalem area, has come to be regarded as an example of self-sacrifice which all the Arabs should take pride in." The correspondent reported that while the Arab fighters continued their attacks on the village of Al-Kastel, "Al-Husseini, who had just returned from Damascus to recapture Al-Kastel village, was killed during the attack [...]

"Informed sources said that Abdel-Qadir was in the forefront of the attack. He had entered a house to blow it up; he never came out again. Haganah circles, however, claim that Abdel-Qadir was buried under the ruins of a house which was blown up by explosives planted by Jewish troops."



Sheikh Amin Al-Husseini receiving condolences for his nephew Abdel-Qadir Al-Husseini

"When the news [of the death of Abdel-Qadir Al-Husseini] was carried to the Mufti of Palestine, Sheikh Amin Al-Husseini — Abdel-Qadir's uncle — he received it calmly, saying, 'We take great pride in the passing away of this courageous commander. Few gain martyrdom on the battlefield.' To those who came to pay condolences, he said, 'I share your sorrow at the loss of this Arab hero,' thus indicating that Abdel-Qadir did not belong only to the Husseini family, but rather to the larger family of the Arabs. He also said: 'We must not let ourselves be grieved at the death of this hero, rather we must congratulate ourselves and take pride in his glorious death.'

"While many of the people who came to mourn with the Mufti burst into tears, he himself remained calm and collected and showed no signs of distress. Among those paying visits to the Mufti were then Syrian President Shukry El-Qawatly and Syrian Prime Minister Gamil Merdem Bey.

"I met the hero 3 days before his death. It was [in Damascus] on Monday, before he returned back to launch his attacks to liberate Al-Kastel. I requested an interview with him, but his reply was, 'great deeds are going to happen and they are better than words.'

"It was as though he felt his death was near, as he looked at his officers and told them, 'there should be no more meetings,' for he was keen to press on into Palestine and liberate Al-Kastel. Then he addressed me, saying, 'I will go straight to Palestine and we will fight them until we achieve victory.'

"He went back to the holy land the same night carrying with him the plans he had drawn up to finish off the Zionists in Al-Kastel and there he was martyred."

Al-Ahram's correspondent in Beirut, Sunday 11 April, 1948.

"Al-Husseini told Hashmi Pasha, the general inspector of the Arab League Army: 'The Jews now have mortars and planes. I cannot recapture Kastel without heavy weapons. Give me that, and I promise you victory.' Hashmi said: 'I have no mortars for you.' Husseini snatched a map lying in front of the Pasha, threw it in his face and roared: 'Let history record that you made the loss of Palestine possible. I will go back to Kastel, even if I die there with all my men.'"



Taha Al-Hashmi Pasha (right) with Fawzi Al-Qawuqji in Damascus

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Jerusalem Road and, later, to occupy major towns which would become part of the state of Israel. By the end of the month, Tiberius, Haifa, Jaffa and West Jerusalem had all been taken, and their Arab residents driven out.

Many of the atrocities that took place in Deir Yassin, including the parading of hostages, can be better understood in light of the death of Al-Husseini the previous day. Raji Sahyoun, describing the atmosphere in Jerusalem during the funeral, recounts: "Sitting in my flat in Upper Baq'a [West Jerusalem], surrounded by petrified friends, we could hear bullets, explosives, automatic rifles, machine guns. It was like everyone had gone mad. The Arabs were firing in the air in mourning and in honour of Al-Husseini, and the Jews were also firing in the air, some to terrorise the Arabs, others in jubilation and spiteful glee at the death of the hero who had terrorised them more than all the Arab armies combined. The Irgun Zvai Leumi seized this opportunity — the absence of most men from all the neighbouring villages of Jerusalem — to commit their crime against the old people, women and children of Deir Yassin."



'It's difficult to count'

Few survived the massacre of Deir Yassin 50 years ago, and of them, even fewer are alive today to recount its horrors. **Amira Howeidy** reviews the carnage through their words

Despite controversy over the exact number of those slain in the Deir Yassin massacre, the length of time their murder took and the strategic significance of the location of the village, the survivors' accounts unanimously agree in their descriptions of the atrocities committed by the Jewish gangs beginning around daybreak on Friday 9 April 1948, and lasting until dusk.

Abu Mahmoud (1) was 21 when the massacre took place. He and his young friends "were ready for whatever might happen after the battle of Kastel." A day earlier, the leader of the Palestinian guerrillas, Abdul-Qader El-Husseini, had been seriously wounded at Al-Qastal. Residents of the neighbouring town of Deir Yassin were alarmed. "By 4.30pm on Thursday 8 April, El-Husseini was dead. We were watching the battle from a distance. After his death we took precautionary measures in case anything happened: we guarded the village until 2.30 the next morning when the Jews began to enter using spot and search lights to look for our fighters. The Jews closed in on the village, exchanging fire with us as they came." Mahmoud Kassem El-Yassini (2), who witnessed the massacre at the age of 15, clearly remembered that the village had actually been surrounded since the night before. His mother was in labour, "we could not get to a hospital because the village was under siege and there was no way out by night. At four o'clock on the morning of Friday 9 April, we heard shots coming from all directions. Then people started screaming: "The Jews have taken us," and "The Jews are taking hold of Deir Yassin."

In the whole village, he says, there were "40 British-made guns... and no mortar of any kind." By contrast, Abu Mahmoud points out, "The Jews had all sorts of automatic weapons, tanks, missiles, cannons."

"Once they entered the village, fighting became very heavy on the eastern side, and later it spread to other parts, to the quarry and the village centre, until it reached the western edge. The battle was on three fronts: east, south and north," Abu Mahmoud recounts. The western front, following the pattern of phase 1 of Plan Dalet (3), was open for survivors to escape and tell others of the horrors they had seen with their own eyes.

The fighting, says Abu Mahmoud, continued till around 3.30 in the afternoon. Most survivors describe what happened during the preceding 12 to 14 hours as "indiscriminate" killing. "They used to enter houses and kill women and children indiscriminately," Mahmoud for one recounts.

"I saw how Hilweh Zeidan was killed, along with her husband, her son, her brother and Khumayyes. Hilweh Zeidan went out to collect the body of her husband. They shot her and she fell over his body... I also saw Hayat Bilbeissi, a nurse from Jerusalem who was serving in the village, as she was shot before the door of Musa Hassan's house. The daughter of Abu El-Abed was shot dead as she held her baby niece. The baby was shot too... Whoever tried to run away was shot dead," says Umm Mohammed (4), 64, who was fifteen when the events took place.

El-Yassini tells of horrific details. "Everything seemed strange. There was blood everywhere. A dead woman holding her baby reminded me of my mother, so I dashed to our house. I found my mother hiding in fear in the basement and when she saw me she cried and started screaming. She told me to go to my uncle's house next door through a hole in the wall to make sure that the rest of the family was still alive. When I peered through the hole, I saw horror. I could see traces of blood all over the place. All that I could see was blood. I knew that they had all been massacred... I had lost my uncles Youssef and Mohammed Hamida."

Rape, mutilation and humiliation were the norm. Says El-Yassini, "there were [corpses of] women lying in houses with their skirts torn up to their waists and their legs wide apart; children with their throats cut open, rows of young men shot in the back after being lined up at an execution wall. There were even bodies of babies." Moreover, "some had vivid crimson or black scars down the left side of their throats. One of the women held a tiny baby against her body. The bullet had passed through her breast and killed the baby. Someone had slit open her stomach, cutting sideways and then upwards, perhaps trying to kill her unborn child. Her eyes were wide open, her dark face frozen in horror."

The number of the victims of the Deir Yassin massacre remains controversial. Most researchers, following a statement given to the press by Mordechai Ra'anan (the then Irgun Zvai Leumi commander for Jerusalem, and commander of the Deir Yassin operation), use the figure 254. The 254 figure appears in almost every account of the massacre at the time it occurred. Sources endorsing that figure include: the Jewish Agency, a Red Cross official, the *New York Times* and Dr Hussein Al-Khalidi, spokesman of the Jerusalem-based Arab Higher Committee. However, this figure has been periodically contested, mainly by extreme right wing Zionist researchers. They claim that the figure cannot be more than 120-140. Yet whatever sources we adopt, it remains an undisputed fact that the number of victims was immense and horrified the survivors. El-Yassini recalls, "I remember hearing a Jewish terrorist who was touring the village and reporting the massacre, saying, 'Minus 15 Arabs. Minus 60 Arabs.' After a while his message on the radio to headquarters became: 'It's difficult to count.'" Fifteen-year-old El-Yassini did not count, but "came across the evidence of widespread murder. Dozens of bodies of men littered the streets... Down an alleyway, no more than 50 yards from our house, there lay a pile of corpses. There were more than a dozen young men whose arms and legs were wrapped around each other in the agony of death. All had been shot at point-blank range through the cheek, the bullet tearing away a line of flesh up to the ear before entering the brain... We found out later that whole families were killed. I heard that the Zahran clan lost 40 men, women and children. They were the first family in Deir Yassin to be slaughtered by the Jewish terrorists."

"A Jewish terrorist reporting the massacre was saying, 'Minus 15 Arabs. Minus 60 Arabs.' After a while his message on the radio to headquarters was, 'it's difficult to count'"

Despite the complete destruction of the village, which was now firmly under Jewish control, the killing frenzy continued unabated. According to Abu Youssef (5) who was 21, "after the battle, the Jews took elderly men and women and youths, including four of my cousins and a nephew. They took them all. Women who had on them gold and money were stripped of their gold. After the Jews had removed their dead and wounded, they took the men to the quarry and sprayed them all with bullets... One woman saw her son taken some 40 to 60 metres away from where she and the rest of the women stood, and shot dead. Then they brought Jewish kids to throw stones at his body. Then, they poured kerosene over his body and set it ablaze, while the women watched from a distance."

"Later, we gathered to check who was missing. We were brought to Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem by the Arab Higher Committee. Each of us was looking for a son, a daughter, a sister or a mother."

"The elderly men were told to remove the dead, both Arabs and Jews. They took the bodies of the Jews and left the Arab bodies: later they were thrown down a well in the village centre."

Abu Mahmoud makes a similar account. "They took about 40 prisoners from the village. After the battle was over, they took them to the quarry where they shot them dead and threw their bodies into the quarry. After they had removed their dead and wounded, they took the prisoners and killed them."

Although the survivors of Deir Yassin were given shelter in the Al-Aqsa Mosque, they were still not safe. "I saw many Jewish assailants targeting the Dome of the Rock with mortar bombs," says El-Yassini. "After a while, we had to go to the village of Abu Dies, because in Jerusalem we were constantly under attack. My [pregnant] mother was overdue and on her way to the hospital with her brother. Jewish terrorists threw a bomb at her. She died but the baby survived. We decided to name him Jihad as she had wanted to call him."

Footnotes

(1) Elias Zananiri, *Gulf News*, 9 April, 1997. Sakakini Cultural Centre website.

(2) Omayma Abdel-Latif, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 17 April, 1997.

(3) Salman Abu Setta, paper presented to the Arab Centre for Futuristic and Developmental Research, Cairo, 1996. Pointing to that phase of Plan Dalet (which aimed at capturing villages along the Tel-Aviv-Jerusalem road from local Palestinian militia), Setta said, "This was the case, always: surrounding the village from three sides, and leaving the fourth open. The murder and mutilation was deliberate, and also the leaving of a number of survivors to recount the story. These massacres were one of their tools of war."

(4) Elias Zananiri, *Gulf News*, 9 April, 1997.

(5) Elias Zananiri, *Gulf News*, 9 April, 1997.

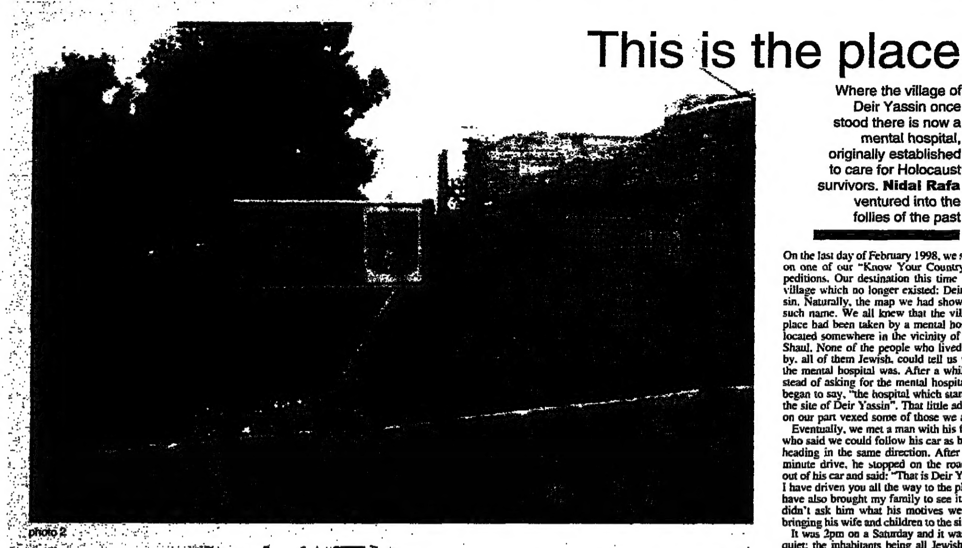


photo 2



photo 1



photo 3

photo 4

photos: Nidal Rafa

Clockwise: An old Arab house inside the hospital compound used as a store; the sign of the Kfar Shaul Mental Health Center; a well-preserved Arab house inside the compound; a dilapidated dwelling, once belonging to an Arab family, in an exclusively Jewish residential area of the neigbouring town

This is the place

Where the village of Deir Yassin once stood there is now a mental hospital, originally established to care for Holocaust survivors. **Nidal Rafa** ventured into the follies of the past

On the last day of February 1998, we set out on one of our "Know Your Country" expeditions. Our destination this time was a village which no longer existed: Deir Yassin. Naturally, the map we had showed no such name. We all knew that the village's place had been taken by a mental hospital, located somewhere in the vicinity of Givat Shaul. None of the people who lived nearby, all of them Jewish, could tell us where the mental hospital was. After a while, instead of asking for the mental hospital, we began to say, "the hospital which stands on the site of Deir Yassin". That little addition on our part vexed some of those we asked.

Eventually, we met a man with his family who said we could follow his car as he was heading in the same direction. After a 15-minute drive, he stopped on the road, got out of his car and said: "That is Deir Yassin. I have driven you all the way to the place. I have also brought my family to see it." We didn't ask him what his motives were for bringing his wife and children to the site.

It was 2pm on a Saturday and it was very quiet; the inhabitants being all Jewish, they were observing the Sabbath. There were many tall buildings, a synagogue; the few people in the street were speaking either Yiddish or English. We were speaking Arabic. Four Jewish women, two elderly and two in their forties, kept eyeing us suspiciously, before one of them exclaimed loudly in English: "What are Arabs doing here?" We pretended not to have heard her as we did not want any problems. We were passing many stone houses that were unmistakably Arab. One of these had a sign saying: "Givat Shaul Synagogue". There was also another large stone house which seemed rather run down. *(photo 4)*

After wandering around the village for about an hour, we started to walk in the direction of the hospital, chatting in Hebrew so as not to arouse suspicions. Before reaching the gate of the hospital, I had tucked away my camera in my handbag. At the gate of the hospital we could see the name in both Hebrew and English: "Kfar Shaul Mental Health Centre." *(photo 2)*

The guard standing by the gate asked us who we had come to visit, but we answered (in Hebrew) that we were interested in old architecture and wanted to look more closely at the building. He said we needed a permit from the public relations office in the hospital, as visits were prohibited except for specific reasons. After chatting him up for a while, a male friend who was with me said he was a representative of a medical firm, and that we could leave our names with the guards — a prospect which I did not relish as I have a very conspicuously Palestinian name: Nidal. Finally, after telling us that cameras were not allowed on the hospital compound, he ushered us in, saying it would only be for a short visit.

Again, all around me, there were many unmistakably Arab houses. One of the houses had an old wooden door *(photo 1)* which stood slightly ajar, and there was what looked like a supermarket trolley, filled with odds and ends, parked in front of it. Obviously, the house was used as a storage space. Another house, bigger and better maintained *(photo3)*, had a sheet from the Torah posted at the entrance, in keeping with Orthodox Jewish tradition. For me at least, nothing could be more incongruous than the combination of this Jewish gesture and the typically Arab arcaded design of the house.

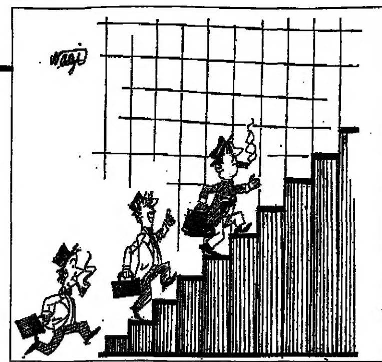
The whole experience was full of such trying ironies, not least of which was the fact that this mental centre was initially created for the psychological rehabilitation of survivors of the Holocaust and the Nazi concentration camps. I could not help wondering whether those who had been fortunate enough to survive the criminal Nazi purge of the Jews knew that they were recuperating in a place where Arab civilians had been massacred by Zionist gangs.

Wandering through the compound, all of a sudden we heard a radio tuned to an Arabic-language broadcasting station. I turned round. The man listening to it was an Arab, who worked in the maintenance section of the hospital. We asked him whether he knew of any specific landmarks of the Deir Yassin massacre. He said he knew nothing, but that a friend of his who used to work in the hospital once brought his mother who was originally from Deir Yassin to the compound. As soon as she set foot there, she started screaming and wailing: "This is the place where my father and brother were butchered before my own eyes." She went on pointing frantically to other spots where women neighbours and their children had fallen. The hospital administration, the man added, called the police who whisked her away.

Nidal Rafa is a graduate of Haifa University and coordinator of the Arab Rights Lobby in the Israeli Knesset.

Centre of speculation

Foreigners are flocking to the Egyptian stock market — and, as **Sherine Abdel-Razek** discovers, they're bringing their investment banks with them



Foreign interest in the Egyptian stock market is on the rise. Each day, more investors are entering the market in search of shares in profit-making companies or those with good growth prospects. Usually, these investors are accompanied by representatives of international financial institutions, brokers, investment bankers and fund managers, seeking licences to set up businesses in the market.

Figures released by the Egyptian Stock Exchange show that foreign shareholdings represent 33 per cent of overall market turnover during 1997 the highest level for foreign investment since the 1992 revival. While figures for the first quarter of 1998 are still to be released, experts estimate that foreign transactions since the beginning of the year will amount to some LE1.84 billion.

Furthermore, Abdel-11 Ibrahim, chairman of the Capital Market Authority (CMA), last week denied rumours that foreigners had fled the market in the aftermath of the Luxor attack and Southeast Asian turmoil. Ibrahim, at a seminar at the Cairo Centre for Economic Information, declared that not only has there been constant growth in foreign investments, but buy orders far exceeded selling activity.

Out of the LE9.8 billion worth of shares traded by foreigners in the 18-month period ending March 1998, buying orders accounted for LE6.8 billion.

Such increases in foreign activity have in the past always raised fears that the Egyptian market might go the way of other emerging markets, running headlong into a crisis on the lines of the Mexican crash of three years ago. Minister of Economy Youssef Boutros Ghali last week sought to calm these fears by saying that the rise in foreign investments does not represent a threat, as it contributes only a minimal percentage of the Gross National Product (GNP). Tarek Allouba, senior investment officer with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the World Bank's investment arm, agreed with Ghali. According to Allouba, it is even hard to say whether the level of foreign investments in Egypt is high or low compared to other emerging markets, as each case has its own distinct characteristics. However, he felt confident enough to rule out the possibility of a major crisis in Egypt. "This is a mature market, with many companies floated and sound economic fundamentals overall," he explained.

Most of the foreign interest is concentrated on companies which enjoy some measure of international recognition. This group includes those listed on the IFC Investable Index and those with Global Depository Receipts (GDRs) traded abroad. Currently there are 54 Egyptian companies listed on the IFC index, and about six companies whose shares trade as GDRs on the London Stock Exchange.

Nevertheless, not all sectors of the Egyptian market have the same appeal for foreign investors. According to Khaled El-Mahdy, head of research at HSBC Investments Egypt, foreign investors are attracted to companies which not only have good growth prospects, but also enjoy large capitalisation, so that the stock is highly liquid. This tends to limit interest to certain sectors: cement, housing, banking and contracting activities.

El-Mahdy points out that foreign interest is increasing as Egypt's commitment to a serious privatisation programme and to neo-liberal economy policies becomes more and more evident. This trend is also, El-Mahdy believes, encouraging more financial institutions to set up business in Egypt.

Beside the British HSBC investment bank, where El-Mahdi works, other heavyweight global financial groups are invading the Egyptian market. Flemings and ING Barings have set up as partners in brokerage companies. EFG Hermes estimates there are between four and six foreign investment fund managers now working in the Egyptian stock market.

As El-Mahdi says, those companies would not be here unless they had convincing market research that their activities on the Egyptian market would prove profitable.

Designs on the desert

A NUMBER of Egyptian businessmen living in Canada have decided to form a group of specialised investment companies which will undertake several projects in the Toshka region once infrastructural work there has been completed.

Another group of businessmen have also decided to obtain 20,000 feddans in Toshka to be cultivated with appropriate crops, 1000 feddans being allotted to each investor.

Head of the Desert Rehabilitation Authority Engineer Mahmoud Abu-Sedeira said that 25,000 feddans were available for every major investor in Toshka, for reclamation, agriculture and industrialisation projects.

One businessman living in Canada has expressed the desire to establish the first project to export Egyptian sand, at a cost of 50 million Canadian dollars. Another project using the Sinai desert sands to manufacture crystal is also under way.

Another investor has said he will launch an $80 million project using excess Canadian butter to prime the Egyptian dairy industries, as well as exporting butter to Arab and African countries.

The suggestions all came in the wake of the expatriate Egyptian businessmen's conference held in Cairo last week.

The ministerial committee supervising the South Valley project, headed by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture Youssef Wali and Minister of Public Works and Water Resources Mahmoud Abu Zeid, have said they will undertake extensive field visits after the Bairam holiday to prepare for laying the foundations of the giant LE 1.07 billion pumping-station at Toshka.

Abu Zeid said that the Egyptian and international companies chosen to construct the station have taken possession of the site and are currently installing housing-units for workers, as well as ground-sensors for the digging operations.

Banking on expansion

THE COMMERCIAL International Bank (CIB) has maintained its good performance, posting profits of LE 267.6 million through the year ending December 1997. This represents a 10.9 per cent increase on 1996.

The bank hopes to capitalise on its success at its general assembly meeting on 21 April, when shareholders will decide whether to raise CIB's issued and paid in capital by LE250 million to LE750 million.

According to Reuters, CIB hopes to raise LE150 million by capitalising some of its reserves. These reserves will be changed into free shares with a par value of LE100 each. CIB is also planning to issue shares to a value of LE100 million to existing shareholders and employees to cover the balance.

CIB led the market last week in terms of volume of transactions. It cornered 14.46 per cent of total market turnover with shares worth LE47.152 million changing hands. While the shares ended at LE 63, up LE1.37, market experts forecast that they might reach LE67 by the time of the general assembly meeting.

The bank is 42 per cent owned by the National Bank of Egypt, one of the four Egyptian public banks. Other shareholders include the World Bank's International Finance Corporation, the Arab Investment Company, CIB employees and other small investors. CIB was the first Egyptian company to register its shares as GDRs for trading on international markets.

Opening up Europe

Negotiations for the proposed Egyptian-EU partnership agreement are almost complete. **Niveen Wahish** follows the last moves of the end game

AMBASSADOR Gamal Bayoumi, chief delegate to the Egypt-EU partnership talks, has announced that the negotiations over the proposed agreement will soon be completed and that the two sides will have a package ready following the final round of discussions scheduled to end late this month.

"We will refer this package to the political level on both sides for the final decision," Bayoumi told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Two meetings have been held during the past couple of months, the first in Brussels last February, while the second closed last week in Cairo.

The two meetings witnessed a number of Egyptian triumphs. According to Bayoumi, Egypt succeeded in convincing the Europeans to include an article allowing for regional cumulation within the section on the rules of origin. This article allows products using input from other Arab-Mediterranean countries to be classed as of Egyptian origin. "This way the agreement will be a catalyst to strengthening Arab relations," Bayoumi commented, adding that this article will not only be included in future agreements with other Mediterranean Arab countries, but will also be added to the existing agreements with Tunisia and Morocco. However he pointed out that for full cooperation to be realised, south Mediterranean Arab countries will first have to form an Arab-Med free trade area adopting the same rules of origin as the EU-Mediterranean agreements.

Both sides have also agreed that during a transitional period, the duration of which has not yet been specified, they will continue to apply the drawback system by which customs charged on imported inputs of exported products are refunded to the exporter. Following the transitional period, the drawback system will be derogated. Bayoumi explained that exporters will then be refunded the difference between the customs charged by Egypt and the customs charged by the EU so as to put them on an equal footing with EU producers and not burden them with extra expenses.

Regarding intellectual property rights, Egypt has stated that it intends to make full use of the transitional period to which it is entitled under the GATT agreement. "The agreement we will sign will allow us to maintain the privileges granted to us by the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights agreement (TRIPS)," said Bayoumi, adding that following the transitional period, Egypt will apply international standards of protection.

Another issue which was tackled by negotiators during their meeting in Cairo was the residency of Egyptians within EU countries. On this topic, the EU agreed that Egyptians living legally in the EU will be treated fairly and without discrimination. In return, Egypt agreed to cooperate in ensuring the repatriation of all Egyptians living illegally in the EU.

While these issues have been agreed upon, the agricultural question remains unresolved. According to Bayoumi, the EU negotiators brought with them to Cairo a new offer for agriculture. However, it was rejected by the Egyptians because it offered even less than the proposal they had made in March 97. "We were very upset and disappointed," reiterated Bayoumi, explaining that the scale of Egyptian agricultural imports from the EU merits more respect. According to Bayoumi, Egypt's wheat imports from the EU alone are worth more than half of its agricultural exports to the EU. To this end, Bayoumi observed, "It is in the EU's interest that it should take into consideration that Egypt is a net importer of agricultural products." He added that Egypt had previously stated its demands and is now awaiting a political decision.

The issue of agriculture remains a thorny one because the EU does not want to treat Egyptian agricultural exports on an equal footing with its industrial exports. While the proposed free trade area allows access for Egyptian industrial exports to EU markets with no customs or quota limitations, it does not make the same provision for agricultural exports. The European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) uses strict protectionist measures to limit agricultural imports to the EU.

Processed agri-products are in much the same position as agricultural exports. On this issue, the EU has recently proposed trading concessions on customs duties. However, according to Bayoumi, this is not satisfactory: "what we want is market access".

These two issues, agriculture and processed agri-products, will loom large among the outstanding business to be tackled by representatives at the third and final meeting scheduled to take place late April or early May 1998.

Another topic fundamental to the agreement is that of the dismantling of customs duties on Egypt's industrial imports from the EU. The two sides have agreed that this will take place in three phases. The first phase will involve liberalising raw materials and capital goods markets, the second will lift customs on production inputs, while the third will deal with final products. The third phase is scheduled to start seven years after the ratification of the agreement, which process itself will take almost three years. "Therefore customs duties will not be lifted on final products for 10 years," said Bayoumi, adding that in the meantime a programme for modernising Egyptian industry would begin immediately. "Almost $1 billion have been allocated by the EU for the first three years of the modernisation programme, which means that we can start enhancing the capacity of Egyptian industry 10 years before customs are lifted," said Bayoumi.

Connecting with Egypt

Representatives of several US states were in Cairo last week seeking to forge contacts in Egypt for over 250 small and medium-sized American companies

Egypt was, this year, the last stop on the itinerary of the Multi-State Catalog Exhibition organised annually by the United States Department of Commerce. The exhibition, which also visited New Delhi, Mumbai and Kuwait, is designed to promote the latest products, technology and services offered by more than 250 US firms and to establish representation, joint ventures or licensing arrangements. **Niveen Wahish** visited the exhibition.

Under the title "Business and Industry USA 98", the event brought to the region representatives of the states of Georgia, Iowa, Maryland, North Carolina, Ohio and Virginia, as well as officials from the US Department of Commerce representing businesses from elsewhere in the US.

The businesses on display at the exhibition cover a variety of sectors ranging from agricultural equipment, cosmetics and computer software to restaurants.

Kevin Langston, Director of International Programmes for the International Trade Division of the Georgia Department of Industry, Trade and Tourism, explained that the exhibition had not come to Egypt for several years, because each year they need to tap new markets. This year, however, the organisers have chosen to include two Middle Eastern centres. "We picked out Kuwait and Cairo because we thought they both have a lot of potential, and are both receptive to American products," said Langston.

Although the aim of the exhibition is to seek representation, joint ventures or licensing arrangements for the companies, Langston believes that "this is a first step that would lead to investment in the end." He added, "Things are a continuum. A company would generally start out by exporting to a market, then when there is sufficient market, they will set up a distribution centre, then they may start manufacturing."

On a similar note, Nancy G. Hesser, International Trade Specialist at the US Department of Commerce, said that part of the role of the Department is to introduce US businesses to new markets and educate them as to what works well. "If we put them in contact with Egyptian firms that come to the fair, those Egyptian companies may be able to explain and negotiate various kinds of business agreements beyond distribution," she said, adding that "we create the initial contact and hope that dialogue will continue and long-term relationships will form."

According to Hesser, Egypt was chosen because the US Department of Commerce recognises that it is a very dynamic market which offers good opportunities for trade with the US.

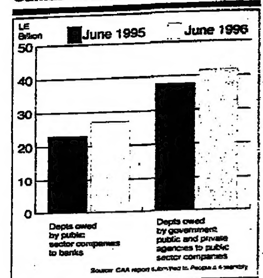
"We want to encourage US companies to be involved in the growth of the Egyptian market," she said.

Spelling out another purpose of the exhibition, Seth J. Vogelman, deputy director of the Eastern Mediterranean Office of the Georgia Department of Industry, Trade and Tourism, said that the exhibition facilitates communication between businessmen from the two countries. It helps the organisers identify needs of the potential markets which they did not know existed, as well as acquainting local businessmen with opportunities that they were not aware of.

Commenting on the choice of Egypt and Kuwait, Vogelman said that there is a new environment for investment and development in the whole region. He added that the privatisation and liberalisation of the region's economy are attracting businessmen to come and look for new opportunities.

'Public sector not to blame'

A new report calls upon the government to help relieve public sector companies of staggering debts. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reports



The exact size of debts of public sector companies slated for privatisation has long been shrouded in mystery. Although most privatisation experts concede that banking debts are probably the most difficult problem facing privatisation, the government has always failed to give specific debt figures.

When the privatisation programme first took off in 1993, government officials announced that public sector companies owed a total debt of LE66 billion to banks and suppliers. Recently, however, a report submitted by the Central Auditing Agency (CAA) to the People's Assembly gave new figures about debts in public sector companies. According to the report, debts owed to banks by public sector companies (overdraft borrowing from banks) climbed from LE23.1 billion in June 1995 to LE26.9 billion in June 1996. The CAA report argued that although the government's efforts in reducing the size of public sector debts showed signs of paying off in the first two years of the privatisation programme, much more is urgently needed to help public sector companies pay off soaring debts which affect privatisation and the state budget.

The CAA report, which was the subject of two weeks of heated debates in the assembly's Plan and Budget Committee, surprised parliamentarians by revealing the exact figure of debts not only owed by public sector companies to banks, but also by a number of government and private and public agencies to public sector companies themselves. According to the report, while banks were owed LE26.9 billion in debts in 1996 by public sector companies, the amount of debts owed by several government and public and private agencies to public sector companies increased from LE37.9 billion in June 1995 to LE41.7 in June 1996. The amount, the report added, accounts for 52.1 per cent of investments in public sector companies, which were estimated at LE80.1 billion in 1996. "Most of these latter debts are the value of credit and goods provided by public sector companies to government, private and public clients," the report said. "The debts also mean that public sector companies are in fact a creditor to others rather than a debtor," it added.

The report also said that it is these huge debts owed to public sector companies that led to a chronic crisis of cash liquidity in companies, forcing them into overdraft borrowing from banks.

MP Nawal El-Tatawi, a former minister of economy, argued that public sector debts by companies was the result of long-term, misguided economic policies in Egypt. "For years, most public sector companies were not run on sound economic bases. For example, for years it was taken for granted that public sector companies should supply government and public agencies with the goods and products they need without receiving cash in return. But a number of public sector contracting companies failed to recover the costs of several projects they were instructed by the government to carry out in the last 25 years," El-Tatawi said. According to El-Tatawi, Privatisation Law No. 203 of 1991 was a turning point in the economic history of Egypt because it exposed some of the most serious weaknesses in public sector companies, especially their debts.

Tolba Ouida, chairman of the assembly's Plan and Budget Committee, said that before the promulgation of the privatisation law in 1991, all public sector companies were treated as affiliates to several government ministries. "Government ministries thus ignored paying the costs of projects implemented and goods supplied by these companies as long as they were treated as their affiliates and under their financial and administrative jurisdiction," Ouida said. He added that what led government ministries to ignore paying the costs incurred by their affiliated companies in implementing government projects or supplying goods was that budgetary allocations to government ministries were not always enough to meet their needs for goods and projects. "It became a vicious circle and, as a result, public sector companies are not to blame for their debts," Eiwida said.

According to the CAA report, out of a total debt of LE41.7 billion owed to public sector companies, LE13.2 was due in 1996 alone. Out of this amount, the report added, government debts accounted for LE7.4 billion or 55.8 per cent. Most of government debts, said the report, are owed to public sector companies in the cotton, electricity, spinning and weaving and construction sectors. "The problem is acute in some companies which are not on the privatisation list, such as the Arab Contractors Company (ACC). The money owed by the government to ACC is estimated at LE676.3 million," the report said.

The CAA report also indicated that debts owed by private sector agents to public sector companies account for LE1.8 billion or 13.8 per cent out of a total LE13.2 billion. As for debts owed by public sector companies to each other, they account for LE4 billion, or 30.4 per cent.

At the end of the debate, the committee agreed with the report's recommendations that the government should help public sector companies that are riddled with huge debts to rectify their financial situation and recover their money. "It's a good thing that the government decided to set apart half of the privatisation proceeds to pay off their debts," Ouida said. "But this should be complemented by helping them reach a final debt deal with banks and privatising some of their high-value assets in an attempt to generate reasonable cash liquidity."

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

228 Government efforts to care for the blind began in 1870 with the establishment of a school for the education of the blind. But it was closed 19 years later for lack of funds. An official report in 1911 estimated there were some 150,000 blind people in the country, with at least an equal number blind in one eye. Services volunteered by Europeans, foreign nuns and government-operated clinics provided the bulk of efforts made in the early 20th century to treat eye diseases and help the blind. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** reviews these efforts from reports published by *Al-Ahram*

Illustration: Makram Henein

ncient times, Egyptians, sur- n all sides by desert where the are spread by the winds and y are exposed to abrupt chang- perature and sudden rainfalls, prone to ocular diseases. This noted by Herodotus who de- apter of his historical work to ptian physicians specialising atment of ailments of the eye. conjunctivitis is no less prev- than it was in the past. it may have become more d as a result of the negligence ssness of the populace, as the ep the open air, permitting ity and cold to cause the sup- hich precedes ocular disease al blindness."

n extract from de Chabrol's e well-known book *Déscrip- gypte*. De Chabrol, one of the Napoleon had brought with s expedition to Egypt, listed ts along with other epidemic Egypt at the time, such as dysentery and smallpox. So were eye diseases, and not- nctivitis, that he noted that every five Egyptians wore a er their eyes.

atistics may not have been the time of the writing of *de l'Egypte*, a century or so onvention for the Betterment umstances of the Blind, held 1911, noted that there were ely 150,000 blind people in a similar number or more of nd in one eye." Several er, *Al-Ahram* cited figures . However, regardless of the the proportion of the vis- red was enormous.

the convention and the *Al-* rt suggest, early 20th cen- was witness to a growing modernising the treatment s then the primary cause of n Egypt — granular con- This was the period that saw n the quack formulas herbal powders — which aused further inflammation blindness — to the use of nd surgery.

issionaries were perhaps the ablish clinics to improve conjunctivitis and sanitary Cairo, Alexandria and the pitals. Perhaps the most fa- community of nuns who es- e Sab' Banat (the seven t, which gave its name to that was used for the treat- njunctivitis. However, the too, began to give some at- e treatment of this disease what were known as "mo- s". In his annual report for Cromer, the British high r, observed that two such pitals" already existed and rnment intended to put two eration, pending the es- f permanent clinics for the ocular diseases in all pro- ls. Lord Cromer added on simistic note that "eye dis- spread as to weaken radicating them entirely." tted that such a project ch to alleviate the spread ses and, consequently, re- of blindness among the ple.

too, devoted attention to he blind. On 30 December , "One of the most important social concerns to which we must turn ourselves in Egypt is the education of the blind who, up until the present, have been treated as idle creatures, without work, who live off the body of Egyptian society." The newspaper was quick to point out that many blind men worked as instructors in the *kuttab* (elementary religious) schools where learning was based largely on rote memorisation. They were particularly adept at this, the newspaper observed, due to the strong memories they developed in order to compensate for their blindness. Indeed, certain *kuttabs* acquired excellent reputations. One instance was the Margoush School which specialised in teaching the blind and deaf. The newspaper, however, deplored the fact that the number of deaf and blind students receiving educational services was in decline. In 1911 it wrote, "There are only 40 blind students in the Sheikh Suleiman Kuttab and about 15 in Al-Sayida Aisha Al-Nabawiya Kuttab and their education is largely restricted to learning how to recite the Qur'an."

Government efforts in this domain date back to the establishment of the School for the Education of the Blind founded under the Khedive Ismail in 1870. When it opened, the school had a total number of 114 students.

It also had a department for the deaf. The school was funded by a yearly subsidy of LE2,000 from the Ministry of the *Awqaf* (religious endowments). It was unfortunately forced to close in 1889 when this subsidy was cut off.

If the policies of the British occupation are owed any credit for furthering the cause of educating the blind, it is due to the fact that their cut-backs on budgetary allocations to public education and their abolition of free education stimulated a rush to open private or community schools. While these schools, largely the product of the endeavours of relatively affluent Egyptian philanthropists, were intended to fill the gap left by the declining government interest in public education, many offered services to the needy, such as orphans, destitute women and those suffering particular medical ailments. Of the latter, the visually impaired constituted a significant category.

To be fair to the cause of historical accuracy, a debt of gratitude is due to the many private Europeans living in Egypt at the time who founded a large number of educational societies dedicated to the service of the needy and the blind in particular. Particular mention should be made of Mr and Mrs Hermitage who founded a private school for the blind at Zeitun in Cairo and of Countess Amamit who opened a similar school in Alexandria. However praiseworthy such private endeavours, *Al-Ahram* observed, they were insufficient to meet the demand for these services in Egypt. Both schools together had a total enrollment of no more than 60 students. Perhaps it was as a result of public pressure, expected by newspapers such as *Al-Ahram*, that the occupation authorities took an important step towards the "betterment of the conditions of the blind". In his annual report for 1905, Lord Cromer wrote, "The government has taken out a long-term lease on the premises of the Zeitun School, at a nominal rent, and is now providing an annual subsidy of LE500 to the school. The government has also solicited donations from the public which has been generously forthcoming." The new influx of revenues enabled the school to expand its curriculum and facilities. *Al-Ahram* reports, "A very astute instructor was brought over from England and students will be able to learn other crafts beyond basket and rattan weaving." Of more significance in the long run, the Zeitun School for the Blind appears to be the first such school to introduce Braille. On a more curious note, *Al-Ahram* reported that the school received a large donation of military uniforms "for the students to wear during the military exercises they perform under the supervision of several Egyptian officers."

While many Europeans may be credited with establishing services for the needy and introducing the ethics of philanthropic work in Egypt during the second half of the 19th century, by the beginning of the 20th century this spirit had become ingrained and continued to gain in momentum in Egyptian society. One factor that made this possible was the growth of an affluent urban and rural upper class that could provide the financial impetus for such endeavours. The Egyptian press, too, played an important role in nurturing the spirit which gave rise to the establishment of many charitable institutions during this period in general, and, with regard to the topic in hand, societies for the blind in particular. *Al-Ahram*, for example, enthusiastically lauded the charitable contributions of many *beks* and *pashas* whom it would bill with such flattering epithets as "the great philanthropist" or the "munificent benefactor".

It is also noteworthy, in terms of the development of Egyptian society, that many upper class women were involved in such charitable activities as "the betterment of the conditions of the blind". Thus, while *Al-Ahram* always enthusiastically heralded charity fêtes whose proceeds were dedicated to improving services for the blind, it gave particular attention to a charity fête of 1909. The fête was inspired by one held in Ezbikiya Gardens the previous year, under the sponsorship of the khedive and which brought in donations totalling LE175. The fête of 1909, however, was unique in that, as *Al-Ahram* advertised, "only women are to attend". No efforts were spared to make it quite a splendid event. "His Royal Highness the Khedive has issued a noble decree ordering his personal royal band to play at the celebrations in the intervals between the various sporting events." Also, the minister of education had arranged for students from various elementary and secondary schools to take part in the sporting events, and the commander of the British forces arranged for the regiment of Scottish Guards "to perform rounds of Scottish dances and fencing matches." The fête took place on 30 January, "under the sponsorship of Their Royal Highnesses, the mother of the khedive and the wife of the khedive," *Al-Ahram* reports. "Also performing was the illustrious singer Sheikh Youssef Al-Manilawi, who delighted the audience with his enchanting voice, thereby lending his noble services to this lofty charitable endeavour."

The Fourth Conference for the Betterment of the Circumstances of the Blind, held in Cairo between 20 and 25 February 1911, marked an important landmark in this particular field of philanthropic work. The conference, the first of its kind in Egypt, did much to draw the attention of public opinion and the press to the cause. The conference met every three years in different cities around the world. Its previous meeting, held in Naples in 1908, was attended by Dr Mohamed Alawi, a famous contemporary Egyptian ophthalmologist, who had convinced his fellow participants to hold the following meeting in Egypt and was elected secretary-general of the conference in Cairo in 1911.

The conference was held at Shepheards Hotel. *Al-Ahram* took the occasion to announce that "the Railways Authority has offered the conference members a 50 per cent reduction on railway tickets, and various maritime and hotel companies have offered similar reductions on their prices." Papers at the conference were delivered in five languages.

The general purpose, as billed by *Al-Ahram*, was to examine the means that would be conducive to the betterment of the circumstances of the blind, the possibilities of establishing an institute for the education of the blind in Egypt. Also on the agenda were two large banquets, one at the Barrages at Qanater and the second in the hotel, "during which the guests will receive commemorative medallions with the face of His Royal Highness engraved on one side and Mohammed Ali Mosque on the other."

The newspaper also announced that the conference would feature an exhibit, "displaying all the equipment and material necessary to educate the blind, along with the names of their manufacturers and the prices."

One of the highlights of the conference occurred during the inaugural ceremonies, when Dr Alawi stunned his audience with the announcement that a British philanthropist had donated LE40,000 for the treatment of ocular diseases in Egypt. The sum was enormous by the standards of the age.

The papers delivered at the conference covered a range of subjects. "The optimum means to combat the causes of blindness" was the title of Dr Sameh's report to the audience. In the ensuing discussion, one participant suggested that the Egyptian government should dedicate five per cent of the tax revenues allocated to education towards the construction of ocular disease hospitals in every provincial capital.

It should also award honorary ranks and medals to those individuals who undertake this charitable work. Other papers at the conference discussed practical educational concerns, such as the instruction of Esperanto and short-hand in schools for the blind. Another, entitled "Crafts and industries which can earn the blind money", engendered a discussion of the types of jobs suitable for the blind, such as work in telephone exchanges and telegraph offices. Ahmed Zaki, "the sheikh of Arabism" as he was called at the time, presented a summary of *Al-Safadi's Encyclopedia of the Blind* using this work to demonstrate that the Arabs used raised letters in order to instruct the blind before the Europeans invented Braille.

Zaki's lecture was so well appreciated that the conference committee issued a statement of gratitude to the publishing house "for its care and precision in printing this invaluable work," while *Al-Ahram* promoted the sale of the book, "which can be found for 15, 20 or 35 piastres, according to the quality of the paper."

In order to help disseminate the work of the conference, one of the members, Dr Naguib Kahil, offered to translate all the papers into Arabic and compile them into a book which would be given to the School of the Blind in Zeitun. Again, *Al-Ahram* lent its backing:

"Most of the papers that were presented in the conference, as well as the ensuing discussions, were of a general nature, devoid of specialised medical theory and vocabulary. They make enjoyable reading for all, particularly Egyptians, whose cherished country suffers from widespread ocular diseases more than any other country."

The conference had another important spin-off effect. In March of the following year, a group of Egyptian notables and prominent expatriates formed the Society to Aid the Blind. Up to this point, in spite of the many charitable societies that had been established in Egypt, there had been no society especially dedicated to the blind. *Al-Ahram* welcomed the idea enthusiastically. "We are certain that it will attract the contributions of thousands of noble-minded men and women," it wrote.

Dr Alawi, who was selected as the society's first secretary-general, gave the inaugural address, in which he outlined the origins of the society. The idea to establish this society, he said, dated back to the first Egyptian Medical Conference in 1902. The conference included several papers on the nature of ocular diseases in Egypt and methods of combating them. Dr Alawi continued to advocate the idea in the successive Conferences for the Betterment of the Circumstances of the Blind. Following the Cairo conference, he met with a group of participants who "agreed to promote the call to dignitaries and upstanding individuals of humanitarian sentiments to participate in this noble and beneficial project." Dr Alawi's appeal was highly successful.

Egypt's first society for the blind drew an initial membership of approximately 250 "Egyptian notables and foreign residents in Egypt."

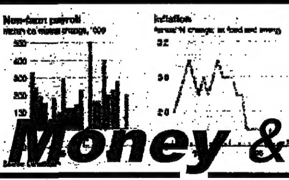


The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

Money & Business

annel 1 widens its satellite audience

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National Development Bank witnesses profit increase

THE NDB's statistics reveal that the Bank has achieved high growth rates in comparison to overall banking growth rates. Its total budget reached LE5.897 billion, compared to LE4.926 billion in 1996 — a 20 per cent increase in the size of its transactions. Meanwhile, total distributed profits reached LE40.3 million, a 30.5 per cent increase on 1996. The NDB is also continuing its loans programme — now offered at 26 branches — designed for small businesses and skilled labour. So far, around 65,000 people have benefited from loans which average between LE500 to LE1000.

9th European Partenariat in Holland, 11-12 June 1998

bdeldom in Holland, the Nether- osting the 19th European Par- ence between 11-12 June 1998. is expected to include a dis- p of international businessmen, tian, Arab and other international companies. The conference is designed to promote joint trade and cooperation among small- and medium-sized companies operating in 13 various sectors.

The programme is financed by the European Commission (EC), which strongly believes that such meetings are essential for promoting long-term cooperation among nations.

The EC in Brussels has delegated the Egyptian European Association for Economic and Social Development — affiliated to the German-Arab Chamber of Commerce (GACC) — to carry out this programme and to coordinate between Egyptian and Dutch companies. It is doing this in cooperation with the European Private Sector Finance Programme and the various chambers of commerce, in order to choose the Egyptian delegation which will take part in the conference.

The Partenariat Conference will involve around 3,000 companies from a total of 50 countries. It, like previous EU partenariat conferences, will give Egyptian companies the opportunity to meet and make contacts for long-term relations with around 500 major Dutch, and 2,500 international, companies.

The partenariat this year will revolve around the following sectors:

- Computers, machinery and communications
- Paper, furniture and foam
- Chemicals, plastic and rubber
- Equipment and machinery
- Medical products and samples
- Communication and infrastructure
- Wholesale trade and consumer products
- Textiles
- Construction industries
- Metallurgical industries
- Electronics
- Services
- Foods and beverages

JBO on the right path to a greener future

THE JUNIOR Businessmen's Organisation (JBO), affiliated to the German Arab Chamber of Commerce (GACC) in Cairo, began its activities by organising a seminar on the environment law in Egypt and its effects economically. The seminar was attended by a number of businessmen and officials concerned with the environment including Dr Tarek Geneina, representative of the minister for environmental affairs, Engineer Salem Mashhour, deputy head of the chamber and Dr Peter Geopfrich, executive director of the GACC.

Participants at the seminar discussed how the Egyptian Environmental Protection Law No.4/1994 could be applied properly, and what obstacles hinder its application in private industrial establishments.

According to Bassant Helmy, responsible for organising the junior businessmen's initiative, the organisation aims at increasing young people's economic, social and environmental awareness. She added that the Egyptian JBO operates through the Junior International Chamber in New York, which boasts a membership of more than 400,000 from around 104 countries. Similarly, the JBO also works with the Federation of German Industrial and Trade Chambers and the GACC.

The organisation is also aimed at deepening the interest in protecting our natural environmental resources and promoting better relations among the younger generation of Egyptian-German and Egyptian-European peoples.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Al-Ahram Weekly

Final words

A departure and a death have joined the array of events now *filling the gap where the peace process used to be*. US envoy Dennis Ross failed again in his mediation mission last week. As he left for home, the bullet-riddled body of Mohieddin Al-Sharif, a prominent Hamas activist and reputed bomb-maker, was found at the scene of a car bomb explosion in Ramallah. Hamas officials said he had been shot by Israeli secret agents before the blast, which was intended as a cover-up. The Palestinian Authority said its investigation showed that Al-Sharif had been assassinated by fellow Hamas members. Has Israel finally achieved its goal — to transform the PA into its policeman in the Occupied Territories?

Perhaps not. Hamas rejected the PA explanation and stuck to its guns. The Islamist group has vowed revenge against Israelis at home and abroad. Israel retorted that any Hamas operation would bring the entire peace process to a halt. What peace process? Heaping infamy upon insult and injury, Israel has now decided to build six new settlements between the occupied West Bank and the Negev Desert.

In Washington, the Jewish lobby is flexing its muscles as usual. Congressmen from both Houses have demanded that no pressure be put on Israel to accept an American peace plan it had rejected. They also urged *the administration not to go* public with the plan, as this would be a form of pressure. The administration, predictably, knuckled under. Secretary of State Albright stated that the US would pursue its efforts, but would "do so privately, without public disclosure of details of proposals." This is exactly what Netanyahu had been counting on.

On the Arab side, there was little or nothing to do, except issue more exhortations. Even the idea of an Arab summit aimed at developing a new approach to help break the deadlock has so far failed to make much headway.

So what next? Probably another Middle East junket by Ross — an 11th-hour effort. A higher-level US diplomatic intervention is unlikely, because the chances of success, as of now, are almost nil.

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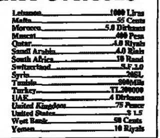
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		Yemen	10 Riyals

Netanyahu's tangled we

Despite feigned nonchalance, Israel's prime minister is finding it ever more difficult to ignore American and European pressure, writes **Ibrahim Nafie**



Israel was the primary beneficiary of the successive crises between the West and Baghdad. These crises enabled Israel to evade any confrontation with the major world powers over the Middle East peace process and the current deadlock arising from Binyamin Netanyahu's intransigence. The United States and the European Union (EU), represented by Britain, its current president, appeared to stand aloof from the peace process during the crisis with Baghdad which engulfed the entire region and overshadowed all else.

But as soon as the dust settled and the tension with Iraq ended, diplomatic moves aimed at moving the peace process forward came to life again and a confrontation between the major world powers and Israel became inevitable.

In the space of one week, Israel was involved in two confrontations: one with the EU, which involved a European peace initiative and the British foreign secretary's visit to the region; the second with the US, revolving around the formulation of an American initiative to end the stalemate on the Palestinian track and the attendant American threat to withdraw altogether from the peace process.

The two confrontations should not be underestimated even if we disagree on their significance. The British foreign secretary was trying to implement a policy agreed upon by the foreign ministers of the EU. Europe took a clear position on Palestinian rights in regard to Israeli redeployment, settlement construction and Jerusalem. The British foreign secretary's visit produced several significant pointers: he was the first top European official to visit the memorial to the martyrs of the Deir Yassin massacre. His visit climaxed when he went to Jebel Abu Ghneim, thereby proclaiming his condemnation of Israel's settlement-building policy and affirming Europe's *refusal to recognise Jerusalem as the capital* of Israel.

Against the storm of protest against Robin Cook inside Israel, British Prime Minister Tony Blair declared his support of everything his foreign secretary said and did. This support reflected the firmness of British policy which, in our opinion, is "new" by all standards. There has been a change in European policy under Britain's presidency of the EU. Previously, Britain had tied its foreign policy, including its position on the Middle East, to US policy. The new change in British policy probably reflects a common American-British-European stance in which Europe is putting a lot more pressure on Israel than the US is doing because of the complications and constraints on the American domestic scene. It is noteworthy that the US has not taken the kind of strong exception to the active European role as it has in the past. This change may have resulted from recent demands by an increasing number of US officials that Europe should be given a chance to play a greater complementary role in Middle East peacemaking.

As for the confrontation with the US, it is manifest in Washington's insistence, over Israeli objections, on putting forward a new initiative to break the deadlock on the Palestinian track. This has caused great tension in US-Israeli relations, so much so that US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright found herself compelled to threaten that the United States would wash its hands of the peacemaking effort if the present stalemate *continues. Albright may have toned down* her remarks afterwards but this does not hide the turmoil in relations between Washington and Tel Aviv caused by Israeli intransigence.

Although Netanyahu is trying to pretend that he is not worried by the increased pressures on him by the US and the EU, close scrutiny shows otherwise. Such pressures have become an influential factor in domestic Israeli politics, as illustrated by the criticism of Netanyahu's extremist policies by some of his political allies. Netanyahu may be able to mobilise popular support against external pressures, but he will always be required by the *ruling establishment* to act as a statesman who recognises the danger of going too far in undermining Israel's relations with the US.

The two confrontations between Israel on the one hand, and London and Washington on the other, were important in another respect. It is true that US President Bill Clinton and Blair are among the strongest Western supporters of Zionism and Israel, but the two men realise full well that, in the final analysis, they are statesmen who fully recognise the national interests of their countries. They know that Israel's security and existence cannot be guaranteed by the unprecedented fanaticism, narrow-mindedness and lack of vision shown by Netanyahu.

Nobody is deceived by Netanyahu's pretense that he does not care about increased American and European pressures. He knows that Israel cannot risk a fully blown *crisis with Washington and that the price* would be a drop in his popularity in both the short and long term at home. Despite signs of impatience with the active role being played by Europe and the US in the peace process, Israeli public opinion realises that international isolation will be the price

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Pricing water [4]

Pricing water in an age of water scarcity is seen by the North as a must; by the South as a calamity. **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** *discusses the dilemma*

Egypt is a hydraulic society. Without the judicious use of the Nile water through irrigation, the thin strip of green land extending along either side of the river would have been engulfed by the desert a long time ago. Since the days of the pharaohs, the state in Egypt has been the main custodian of Nile water and the guarantor of its fair distribution among all subjects free of charge. The state-Nile-citizen relationship is firmly entrenched in the collective memory of Egyptians, who find the notion of paying for water a totally alien one.

But as water becomes ever more scarce, as the supply of water *falls far below demand* all over the world, it acquires a price. Pricing is a means by which the use of water is measured and regulated. In his key address to the International Conference on Water and Sustainable Development in Paris last month, French President Jacques Chirac forcefully asserted that "water has a price", and that "zero price is a forewarning of scarcity". He added that "people deprived of their drinking water supply or sewage outlets are all too well aware of this. Experience has shown that their cost to the individual rises as public investment sinks. This is the reason why, even in impoverished neighbourhoods, people are ready to pay for water and sanitation."

At the final session of the Conference, French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin spoke of pricing water in less categorical terms. He declared that water "is not a product like others" and that it cannot be marketed as other products can. The pricing of water in poor countries cannot be placed on an equal footing with its pricing in rich countries. Besides the *economic* dimension, there is also a *social* dimension. The combination of the social and the economic dimensions, the establishment of some kind of equilibrium between them, are bound to introduce a *political dimension* as well.

Of course, those states in the developing world which strongly resist the principle of pricing can invoke their sovereign prerogatives to justify non-compliance. But the negative aspects of pricing can be overcome more effectively through economic mechanisms than by legal sanctions. Chirac himself admitted that the required infrastructure would cost an estimated 400 billion dollars plus. To expect poor countries struggling to meet their own domestic obligations to help assume a burden of this magnitude is ludicrous.

The French president recommended that an International Academy of Water be established as an informal body through which people concerned with water management in every country could exchange views and pool their experiences in the fields of pricing water, shared management and other institutional arrangements. To avoid creating another agency, he proposed placing the Academy under the aegis of an already existing institution.

If the principle of pricing water will become more and more difficult to resist as water becomes ever more scarce at the global level, attempts to impose the principle on the community of nations at large, and particularly in the South, will come up against *formidable obstacles. A compromise* solution between North and South will have to be worked out somehow. As Chirac mentioned in his statement, new forms of partnership will be needed, not only between North and South, but also within communities of both the North and the South; between the public and private sectors; through ensuring a more active role for women, for 'civil society'; through the establishment of such principles as making parties which pollute water pay for the damage they cause.

The Paris Conference tried hard to find a way of reconciling two apparently irreconcilable notions: that of mobilising private investments to face water shortages and that of ensuring access to potable water for the poorest communities on earth. Two observations were made on this matter: good management of water is beneficial to its users; the recovery of the cost of the adequate functioning of water services is not incompatible with applying a policy of subsidies for the poor. However, a greater effort must be made to come forward with appropriate solutions for these complex problems.

Now that the community of nations has become aware of the critical threat of water shortage, practical steps can be taken to regulate *the use of water. However, this* will require building up a more comprehensive knowledge of water from various perspectives, such as the relationship between water and poverty. At the same time, it is heartening to know that in areas believed to suffer from severe water shortage unknown and/or non-traditional sources of potable water have been found.

Living with water shortage is a totally new experience. The Paris Conference laid down an action programme with fixed priorities. In the year 2000, a meeting will be held in The Hague to test the programme and introduce whatever amendments may be necessary in light of its implementation.

To The Editor

No to "normal"

Sir- Thank you for the continued excellence of your paper! I write in response to Ms Djenane Kamel's letter in your publication last week (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 12-18 March). While I agree absolutely with Ms Kamel's assessment of Egyptian TV's presenters and anchorwomen, I would like to point out two things. Taste in clothing, excessive make-up, elaborate hairstyles and proper preparation are all things that can be changed. One's weight is a rather more complex issue(!) which Ms Kamel dismisses so cursorily, as if a diet and exercise is the answer to all obese people's woes.

It's not as easy as that, I'm afraid, and I speak from personal experience and a lifetime of struggling with a weight problem. Does Ms Kamel realise how politically incorrect she is in this age of feminism where women are striving to be accepted for what they are and not Barbie dolls? Ageism, sexism (and soon fattism) are illegal in many countries. The state of Michigan has legislation against discrimination against any human being or the grounds of size already! How long ago was it fashionable to be plump in Egypt? Not long.

The second, and unforgivable, thing, to my mind, is Ms Kamel's glib insistence that presenters fall "within the accepted norms of weight". Accepted by whom? Does she not realise that pressure from society and people like herself to conform to "accepted norms", which are totally unrealistic for some people, causes eating disorders like anorexia nervosa and bulimia? The late Princess Diana was a well-known victim of an eating disorder and did much in her life to raise awareness of these illnesses. Human beings come in all shapes and sizes, Ms Kamel. I look forward to the day where people not falling "within accepted norms of weight" are *given their place* on TV in Egypt, as is happening in other countries. Get real!

Jill E. Hassan
Maadi

'A' as in aye

Sir- I couldn't agree more with Mrs Djenane Kamil's letter ("Dyeing on their feet", Letters to the Editor, *Al-Ahram Weekly* 12-18 March). I do want to add that the ladies who read the English news bulletins on Channel 2, with the exception of one of two, are a sorry lot. It is not their fault, for they know not what they do; nor do those who appoint them. The exceptions are not necessarily those who have served longest.

Due to the news-readers' poor enunciation, which results in a garbled rendition, the audience has a hard time trying to *fathom what they are saying*. Nor can the listener fail to wince at their extraordinary pronunciation of the English language or their up-and-down-the-scale tone.

"Because" will quite blithely be distorted to "becose"; "surprised" will have a surprisingly long-drawn-out first syllable, to raise the listener's eyebrow in wonder; "delay" will likewise become "deelay" and "the" will turn into 'thee' before a consonant instead of a vowel. Is that how English became American?

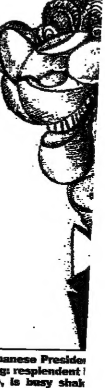
How out of tune can you be with the musical tonalities of a language? How unbalanced can your sense of rhythm be? A distressing situation, but not with*out a solution*.

As children at the English Girls' College in Chatby, Alexandria, before going on stage to take part in a school play, we were given a short course in elocution by a specialist. Very simple! We were taught how to enunciate correctly the vowels of the English language: 'a' *as in* 'age', 'e' as in 'eel', 'i' as in 'eye', 'o' as in 'owe', 'u' as in 'you'. This lesson was repeated till we were "vowel perfect", our lips changing shape to form the pure and perfect sound of each vowel.

Perhaps the British Embassy could be called upon to lend assistance to the TV Federation by providing a specialist in elocution (imported from a school of drama) to coach readers of the news in correct enunciation, of the English language, so that, eventually, the audience would not have to strain *to catch* the meaning and the substance of the spoken word, and not be tortured by a false note along with the all-round massacre of a language demanding respect.

Mona Shaheen
Zamalek

Starting this week, 'The Press This Week' will be replaced by a regular 'To the Editor' section. Our readers are invited to contribute opinions and comments to this forum. All contributions should be addressed to The Editor. E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg; Fax: +202 578 6089

Lebanese Preside... ning: resplendent ... too, is busy shak... readying itself fo... president's pomm... estinian *kuffiyeh*, ... role Lebanon can... nothing so much ...

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Boiling over

The Palestinian Authority (PA), for reasons of its own, has in the past few days offered three different versions of killing of Hamas bombing expert Mohideddin Al-Sharif, finally exonerating the Israeli intelligence services from the charge of having assassinated Al-Sharif, throwing the blame instead on financial and political strife within the ranks of Hamas.

The PA's security services have, hitherto, offered no compelling evidence to refute the charges made by Hamas and Al-Sharif's family, which reject the PA's story and insist that the Israeli secret service, Mossad, was responsible for the Hamas leader's assassination. Hamas has also upheld its resolve to avenge Al-Sharif.

The absence of compelling evidence absolving Israel of Al-Sharif's murder should be weighed against the compelling circumstantial evidence in favour of its involvement. The Israeli intelligence services had been hunting Al-Sharif for months — even years. He was considered the architect of the series of explosions which devastated Israel after Yehia Ayyash, who had masterminded several bomb attacks, was killed, also by Israel. Al-Sharif may have been killed by Israeli agents, or possibly by the double agents active throughout the Palestinian political spectrum. This time, through its constant denials, Israel seems to be giving itself away.

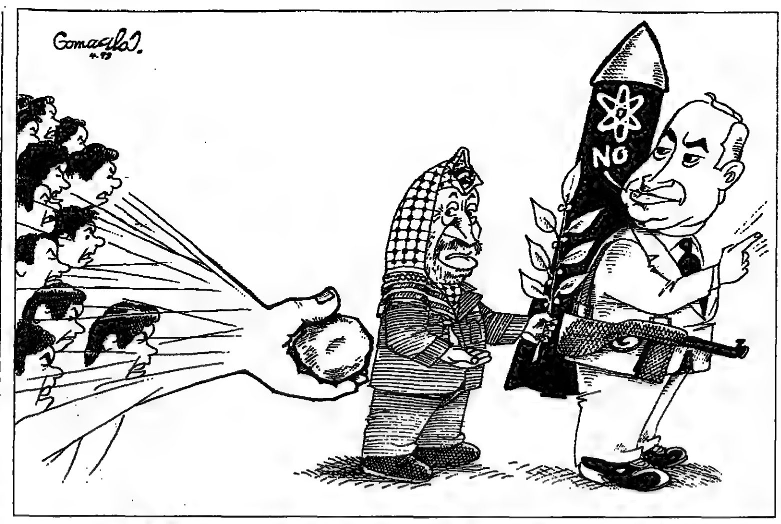
Since its establishment, Israel has commonly resorted to assassination as an expedient means to its policy ends. By assassinating Ayyash, Israel triggered retaliatory suicide bombings which claimed 60 lives, precipitated the downfall of Peres and the accession of Netanyahu and the Likud, and put an end to the peace process.

Through terrorism and the physical liquidation of its enemies, however, Israel aims at more than the simple elimination of an enemy, as in the case of the Mossad's failed attempt to kill Khaled Mish'al in Jordan. It seeks to counter international pressure to honour its commitments under the peace agreements in order to get the process moving again. By creating an environment of intense hostility and violence, Israel is justifying, to its own people and to the world at large, its rejection of any measure that may serve peace.

In this perspective, US efforts to urge Israelis and Palestinians to exercise self-restraint are totally unrealistic. Such US endeavours only buttress Israeli state terrorism and prevent the Palestinians from retaliating or evening the score, since Hizbullah in southern Lebanon has taught Israel the dangers of such retaliation.

Hamas may have complied recently with the Palestinian Authority's urging that it suspend operations against Israel, in the hope that some progress would be achieved. But with the assassination of one of its leaders, threats to escalate the violence against Israel would be fully justified.

Does Israel truly wish to see an end to violence against its own people? Does it seek to help the Palestinian Authority abide by its commitments to security guarantees, which Israel uses as a pretext for its reluctance to withdraw from Palestinian land? On the contrary, it is quite clear that Israel seeks to maintain a certain level of insecurity and violence, beyond its genuine security needs. Without this process of violence and counterviolence, Israel cannot sustain its continued occupation of Palestinian land on any grounds. In other words, when the Palestinians refrain from violence, Israel deliberately incites their fury — precisely the situation created by Al-Sharif's assassination.



Soapbox

Sensation, not scandal

The "yellow press" relies on fabricated scandals, false reports and unsubstantiated rumour. Its aims are blackmail and distortion of the truth. In this sense, it does not exist in the Arab world. True, Arab and Egyptian newspapers are given to sensationalism, a trend rooted in political rivalry before 1952 and popular among a passionately nationalist public. Political adversaries may have called sensationalist publications "yellow". But this was a form of hyperbole, intended to taint the reputation of these newspapers, rather than an exercise in journalistic taxonomy.

Following the nationalisation of the press in 1960, Egyptian newspapers lost their competitive edge and, consequently, much of their vitality. Readers began to turn to Arabic-language newspapers published abroad, which offered more comprehensive coverage, more independent analysis, and more intellectual diversity.

In response to this challenge, Egyptian press institutions began to rejuvenate their publications. Others began to publish outside the national press establishment, which could no longer absorb the enormous numbers of young and gifted journalists.

One paper in particular was in the process of restoring the passion that has been missing from the Egyptian press for so long. Its impetuousness spilled over into the occasional folly, leading to the closure of the newspaper, but this gives no one the right to condemn the journalists who worked there. Their methods cannot be described as "yellow journalism". They simply needed to strike a healthy balance between enthusiasm and good sense.



Safynaz Kazem

This week's Soapbox speaker is a literary critic and deputy chief editor of Al-Mussawar weekly magazine.

Time for a new beginning

After years of haggling over less and less, the end of the peace process should mark a new beginning for the Palestinian struggle for self-determination. **Edward Said** suggests a concrete agenda

Dennis Ross's latest "return" from the Middle East to Washington brought the usual results: absolutely nothing new by way of advancing a moribund "peace process." Israel has refused the US's modest proposal of an additional 13 per cent withdrawal, and the Palestinian Authority has refused the refusal. As a confirmation of the hardline Israeli position Netanyahu declared in a speech on 26 March (reported by *Ha'aretz* on 27 March) that "we are making a constant effort to preserve the maximum [in terms of land], including territories I would fight for even if they had no security value."

Then he added, "the permanent settlement will follow negotiations on the territorial dimension and on the functional dimension. The functional dimension would include limitations on the powers that would accrue to the Palestinians, such as a prohibition on their concluding international alliances, using Israel's water sources, threatening Israeli air space, flooding the area with refugees." So truculent and aggressive has Netanyahu become that he seems to prefer talking exclusively to himself and to his right-wing accomplices than to anyone outside that tight little circle.

The wonder of it is that he is still perceived by some American supporters of Israel — the Clinton administration among them — as making some sense. Whereas the reality is that Netanyahu lives in an Alice in Wonderland construction of his own making, sounding off like the March Hare or the Queen of Hearts with scarcely a concern for facts, possibilities, and the existence of other interests in the world besides his. I think it is obvious he believes that in the long run the Palestinian leadership will settle for 9 per cent plus the 3 per cent already under Palestinian self-rule, and just leave Israel alone, as if the deal had been concluded happily to everyone's satisfaction.

For its part the Clinton administration is too concerned with the president's domestic agenda to do very much about the declining American position in the Middle East. For the time being then, US policy will be left to the handful of small, mean-spirited men, most of them former functionaries of the Israeli lobby, whose main purpose seems to be to keep themselves in business.

Robin Cook's confrontation with the Israelis may have signalled a change in European Union policy, but it is still too early to tell. In any event there is no gainsaying the central tension, which is between Palestinians and Israelis over the land. That contest will continue, and in the absence of a credible Arab military deterrent, or a serious American dispute with Israel, it is imperative that we think of what is within our means at present.

For Palestinians, one of the first imperatives is somehow to prevent disadvantaged Palestinians from taking jobs constructing Israeli settlements. Obviously such jobs are taken out of desperation. Three weeks ago when I asked a Palestinian truck driver why he was working for an Israeli contractor, he replied, "I need to put food on my table. Find me another job, and I'll stop right away." With the cooperation of the Authority we need immediate attention to this problem, the answer to which is to set up an unemployment fund to prevent, or at least discourage, men from taking these jobs. I see no reason why the Legislative Council cannot challenge Arafat on this point, putting it in the context of the continuing debate over PA corruption. The fact is, for example, that somewhere between 40 and 50 thousand men are employed in security services, most of them as informers and supererogatory guards: why can't this expenditure be revised so as to divert money from security to land preservation? Additionally, there are four million Palestinians living abroad, quite a few of them well-off and able to contribute a monthly sum to this unemployment (or alternative employment) fund. This is an urgent necessity, which in our addiction to pointless theoretical debate over "strategy" is left out completely.

Along with constraining Palestinians from building Israeli settlements we have to think over the whole matter of civil disobedience campaigns. I do not refer to a new intifada, since that would be to repeat something that cannot be repeated. But I do think a sustained series of peaceful marches on settlements undergoing construction, blocking traffic, demonstrations, etc. must be considered as part of a general strategy for containing Israel's daily expansionism. Since we cannot for obvious reasons reproduce the southern Lebanese situation, which has given Hizbullah an important victory, we have to plan for what we can do, and more important, for what we can win. Rebuilding demolished houses falls in the same category of disobedience and resistance. But none of this can be contemplated unless the leadership, under pressure from the Palestinian population, is driven to raise these matters, forced to concede publicly that the whole Oslo process no longer has any substance and that more urgent matters of self-preservation are our new priority.

Lastly an international campaign against settlements and for self-determination must be mounted. This would help the European Union to determine its priorities more crisply, and at last would put the US on notice that we can no longer tolerate the slow erosion of our territorial sovereignty as a people. I have been surprised during the past few months that wherever I have spoken or written the response has been enthusiastic: Arabs, Europeans, Americans, Asians and Africans are waiting to hear from us, are looking for ways to support a struggle that diminishes Israel's power and extraordinary arrogance. Yet unless we once again assume the responsibility for conducting our fight against apartheid as a just one, nothing very much can happen. We have been bogged down for so long in the minutiae of a fraudulent peace process that we have been unable to utter or even recall our own first principles. Netanyahu's Israel has made no secret of wanting to fight a war of attrition against us, so surely the time has come for us to admit this and disrupt the wearying charade that has involved us in five years of fruitless haggling over less and less.

We have to be able to engage Israeli public opinion on our own terms, not as providers of security but as seekers after justice. I have no doubt that outside the main channels provided by the establishment — Labour, Likud or religious — there are numerous avenues for communicating with Israelis who are prepared to fight against apartheid and theocracy in their country. And here we must courageously welcome such people and not hide behind Jesuistic casuistry about being opposed to "normalisation." We must normalise with Israelis who share our goals, that is, self-determination for two peoples in Palestine. And we must be prepared to meet and visit with people like Daniel Barenboim — who has made no secret of wanting to perform for Palestinian and Arab audiences — who correctly perceive that the only real avenue open for reconciliation is culture, not politics, nor economic schemes. What can be wrong with having him perform in Ramallah or Cairo or Damascus, a great artist who speaks of peace and justice for the Palestinians openly? There are others like him whom out of fear and timidity we have avoided. The time has come to make justice a common topic for us and for Israelis.

I make no pretense that the proposals I have suggested here are anything like an answer to Dr Haidar Abdel-Shafi's question, what is to be done? But for intellectuals the important thing is to think new thoughts and open lines of reflection that convention and orthodoxy have closed to us. Ours is a very unusual set of circumstances: our Israeli opponents are unusual, our history is unusual, our future, therefore, must be unusual. Surely the end of Oslo is in fact the beginning of something else, which in the present disarray has got to be better than anything now before us. I firmly believe that Oslo and all its domestic consequences on Palestinian society have been detrimental and, in the most profound sense, corrupting. Personal interests have come first, avoiding central tasks, and looking for a quick profit by doing things as usual — all these have led us to our present impasse.

Certainly Israel and the US have played a leading part in this debilitation, but it is unacceptable to overlook our own quite central role. We represent our own most formidable challenge: unless it is met we might as well simply give up and become the Middle East's Red Indians.

Occupied land, not disputed territories

Can the UN do to Israel what it did to Iraq? **Abdel-Azim Hammad** *wonders*

A salient result of the latest crisis between the US and Iraq was that American, Israeli, and, to a certain extent, UN officials were forced to defend themselves against accusations of applying double standards in dealing with the Iraqi problem, on one hand, and that of the Palestinians, on the other. As expected, particularly when American students at Ohio State University addressed those charges directly to both their foreign and defence secretaries, Albright and Cohen, these two, together with the Israeli and UN officials, resorted to legal arguments as the only weapon in support of their stance.

Dore Gold, the Israeli envoy to the UN, published an article in several American and European papers in which he argued that the UN Security Council resolutions on the Iraqi problem were based on Chapter 7 of the UN Charter. This chapter stipulates the procedures regulating measures to maintain or restore international peace and security. But the Security Council resolutions relating to the Palestinian problem and the various aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict are subject to Chapter 6 of the Charter, which covers the peaceful settlement of international disputes.

Gold then concludes that the Arab lands occupied by Israel, including the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights, are disputed lands, not territories occupied by force, and therefore different from Kuwait, which was invaded by Iraq. Negotiating, he wrote, is the only acceptable way of settling the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The US president's reference to this matter has followed nearly the same line of reasoning as Gold's. Asked why he had not openly condemned the Israeli expansion of the settlement project in Jebel Abu Ghneim in East Jerusalem, he said that both the Israelis and Arabs believe they have a right to this land. On the other hand, when the UN was accused of applying double standards during the recent visit of Secretary-General Kofi Annan to Gaza, his reply was quite succinct. He said the UN Security Council resolutions were issued according to Chapter 6, the terms of which do not stipulate any binding measures to enforce implementation.

It is evident that the UN secretary-general is not entitled to do or say anything beyond the scope of UN Security Council resolutions. We are right in assuming that his answer may imply that the Security Council should have issued new resolutions on the basis of Chapter 7 in connection with the Arab-Israeli conflict, since those previously issued under Chapter 6 have not been implemented and, therefore, peaceful settlement has not been achieved.

There are at least four provisions under the UN Charter and UN Security Council Resolution 242 that explicitly nullify Gold's conclusion.

The first of these four provisions is stated in the Charter under Article 1. It stipulates that the settlement of international disputes shall be effected in conformity with the principles of international law and justice. This imputes the rejection of any settlement made with regard to the balance of power, if it contravenes the balance of international equity and legality. Evidently, the occupation of any land renders the balance of power in favour of the party occupying the land. If that party claims that the Security Council's failure to adopt a resolution concerning the land dispute, according to Chapter 7, gives it legal entitlement to keep the land or parts thereof, it is, in fact, not referring to international legality or the provisions of the law, but to the political jargon that supports the imposition of the status quo.

The second provision that explicitly nullifies Gold's conclusion is stipulated in the preamble of Resolution 242, which reiterates the illegality of acquiring others' lands by force. The third is also stated in Resolution 242. It stipulates that Israel shall withdraw from all the land occupied during the June 1967 war, according to the French text, and from lands occupied during that conflict, which is rendered by the English text.

Israel cannot claim that the territories it occupied in the war of 1967 do not belong to others. The Golan Heights have always been part of Syria, while the West Bank was part of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. That Jordan ceded its sovereignty over the West Bank does not refute the truth that it belongs, not to Israel, but to another country, according to the UN resolution concerning the division of Palestine into two states, one Arab and one Jewish, and also according to the more comprehensive legal principle, which covers the fourth provision referred to. It states that the principle cited in Paragraph 2 of Article 1 of the UN Charter stipulates equal rights and self-determination. This principle clearly and unambiguously rejects the idea that any nation, like the Israeli people, should rule another nation, like the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza. This is the paramount principle of the UN Charter, as well as one of the chief purposes of the international organisation.

The West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights have never been and never will be "disputed lands". They are "occupied territories". There is no legal obstruction to prevent the Security Council from dealing with the Israeli occupation of these lands as it did with the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. The Security Council is impeded from implementing such procedures only by the US's policy of double standards — nothing else.

The writer is assistant chief editor of Al-Ahram.

Reflections

By Hani Shukrallah

Invasion of the body-snatchers

At dawn on 24 January 1972, some 1,000 left-wing students who had occupied the Cairo University campus overnight were arrested. Later that morning, students arrived to find the university closed and the campus besieged on all sides by armoured cars and hundreds of helmeted, shield- and stick-wielding security men. Demonstrations, in which tens of thousands took part, erupted: the students headed for the city centre, and occupied Tahrir Square. For two full days, the security forces were unable to dislodge the protesters from the heart of the city, which, as we all know, is not only the heart of the country, but also the mother of the world.

Even as the students were stone-throwing their way towards the city centre, Sadat was on live television and radio, addressing the nation. The president reassured his subjects that only a tiny, deviant minority had misled the rest of the students and created disturbances. Sadat even put a number on this deviant minority: 30. The arrested students, who at the time were being held in a sort of stable, the original purpose of which I have never found out, were afforded a moment of hilarity when they heard — thanks to a radio provided by the arresting officers — the president's booming voice, announcing that all of them had been released, except for 30 deviant elements: "these," he said, with a characteristic snarl, "I want." Outside, however, the families of nearly 1,000 students were under the terrifying impression that their own sons and daughters were among the dreaded 30. The media started hotly debating the pernicious designs of the deviant 30. Solid proof, the public was assured, had been found that some of them were in the pay of North Korea! This bizarre choice of paymaster seems to have been made with a view to causing the least harm to Egypt's relations with either the Soviet Union or China, which would have been highly unpolitic at the time.

As it transpired, all the students, including those arrested later in the Tahrir demonstrations, were released in batches during the following month. They were welcomed as heroes by their fellow students; no one was mistreated in any real sense, and, for the "victims", the whole affair was more a romantic interlude than a trauma. The media huff died down, and, along with it, the deviant 30 and their Korean connection disappeared.

How much, one wonders, are those 1,000-odd students, now in somewhat rickety late middle age, owed in libel compensation? Is the accusation of being the paid agent of a foreign country supposed to be less libelous than describing someone as foolish, which, however justified or unjustified, as the case may be, is obviously a value judgement, not an assertion of fact? No one was punished for describing nearly a thousand students as the paid agents of Kim Il Sung, "the beloved leader of 60 million Koreans and 30 Egyptian students," as the students themselves were to joke later. Today, however, a journalist remains in prison — for suggesting that one person, a public figure and writer, was foolish.

Libel was not the only issue that brought that small fragment of modern Egyptian history to my mind. The logic of healthy majorities susceptible to invasion and corruption by tiny and alien minorities continues to permeate our political, cultural and intellectual life. It is, moreover, one that seems to enjoy almost universal appeal — in opposition no less than in official discourses, used with equal facility by secularists and religious fundamentalists. Bad journalism, biased, libelous and sensationalist, thrives on it: images and stories of Afghani-clad Islamist militants, infiltrating our youth with money and brain-wash detergent; internet-corrupted, devil-worshipping skinheads dragging our innocent young onto the path of the Western devil; Mossad girls distributing their favours, and AIDS, among our clean, healthy young men, and pernicious Zionist networks marketing aphrodisiac chewing gum, driving our virtuous young women haywire with sexual frenzy. Have these and similar images not provided the daily fodder of sensationalist journalism in Egypt during the past few years?

Now, the "yellow press" has been identified as yet another alien germ, this time of Cypriot strain, wreaking havoc within our otherwise healthy journalistic body. The same petard hoists us all.



Maestro Richard Edlinger



Vardan Mamikonian



Manal Mohie El-Din



Wolfgang Lindenthal

Bush fires and birthdays

David Blake sniffs

Cairo Symphony Orchestra: Gustav Mahler: Symphony no 6 in A minor: Ahmed El-Saedi, conductor: Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 4 April

Things couldn't be worse. Cairo's crumbling. Music is turning to cheese, too many grubs around. Plenty of richesse, but rags abound. For singers at the Opera, never mind your upper register, just *cherchez les dimes*. Careful, though, because music is the stuff for social climbers. Get to the top quickly. And so on.

They are saying Cairo Symphony Orchestra sounds tired. It could be because it works hard. It was not tired on 4 April. Under Ahmed El-Saedi, its resident conductor, it performed the 6th Symphony of Mahler. And the result was a bomb of beautiful music.

The performance will probably go down in history as a very special thing — an event. Never performed here before, it was an explosion, a force of nature, outside time and reality. This symphony was given a tremendous performance. It surges over all barriers of locality. We can forget the celebrations of other institutions, forget the Bolshoi struggling along on a tarnished brand name. Cairo is changing. New powers are at work. Excitement is in the air. For what purpose? No answer. The wind is just blowing from many strange directions.

Where were we actually as the sounds of Mahler ebbed and flowed around the Opera House? Africa? The Middle East? Names flew: Haitink, Bernstein, and newer ones from the Pacific rim — and Carnegie Hall.

The 6th Symphony is founded on a rock like New York. It has deep, dark foundations, but what's going on at the top is the Big Apple itself. There are big apples all over the place these days, but this symphony like the city is the true one — and there are no holes in it. Under El-Saedi it was pure and fresh right through. El-Saedi has the gift of clarity.

The symphony opens with a march: death or war or both or none. Maybe it is just remorse. Marches haunt Mahler and they go through this entire symphony. The brass is used constantly and enlarged for this concert all through the four movements, and it did heroically. Mahler is merciless: he uses the brass like cellos, sometimes like flutes, militant or elegiac.

This extraordinary music was written in 1904 before wireless, TV or the cinema, and almost before the motor car. The age of the great orchestra was upon the symphonies of the world. Tonight's band was about 120 strong. As the texture flashed and darted above the devilish dark tides of the first movement, shreds of broken melodies whirled along like flower petals caught in a rip-tide.

Mahler is narrative music, but there are no happenings. Endless *rallentandos* going on like a coming Black Death. In the second movement, all the rancid shadows of the first slip away. Everything lightens and sparkles, except that, as usual with Mahler, such sounds suggest loss and guilt — all the things you should have done in life and never had the time to complete. This composer has been there before you. His symphonies may age but they do not date. Their simplicity preserves them. They belong to every man everywhere.

By the third movement we are far out on the voyage, and up from the music comes an atmosphere spacious and enveloping and a tune so helplessly lonely it suggests the last rose of summer. There is time — for everything. The enjoyment is slaverously sensual. What does one look at as the sounds caress? Flesh satinised or the ocean rolling, sucking the security of rocks to shreds. There are no images: everything is an echo of something else. The architecture collapses into orgiastic sleep. But it is El-Saedi who wields the stick in all this. No mud, no tangled threads. We know we are somewhere more beautiful than life. That is sufficient.

The last section is a problem. Mahler cannot bear to end it. We have had everything, so weariness can come. It is here that El-Saedi's methods pay off because his clarity is pellucid. He is almost diplomatic in his desire to present Mahler to the listener without *longeur*. And to do this he has to resort to a slim tone which varies the immense scale of the conclusion. All elegy is swept away. The path is cleared of the debris of hesitation and defeat and we are uplifted to face new struggles.

What is that in front of us? The world. How wonderful.

Vardan Mamikonian: Piano Recital: Gomhouriya Theatre: 2 April

Another bush fire swept across Cairo ending at the Gomhouriya Theatre with Armenian pianist Vardan Mamikonian.

From the age of 10 he has been prestigious. Born in Yerevan, he has gathered up first prizes and high opinions from everywhere in which he has touched down. There is no overlooking such gifts, and with them he ended at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatorium from 1988 to 1991. And then he took off into the piano fast lane formula, the route for the chosen few of the piano world — and he is still only 27.

Cairo has visits from many pianistic wonders. But against them Mamikonian is still exceptional. It is hands — his hands and fingers and their exceptional muscular structure. He has the sort of finger and bodily appearance of the old virtuosi like Godowsky, whom he resembles: neither tall nor short, but stocky, thickset and full of spring. But it is the hands — he has that strange breed of hands Rachmaninov called hangman's hands. Green fingered hands also: everything they touch grows. There seems to be no piano at all. He weaves the sounds out from space, not from the ivories. There is no "lovely intriguing me" about him, no private giggles at his own cleverness. What he delivers is done straight, and virtuoso-wise he delivers a lot. His technique or piano wisdom is infallible. He is restful to listen to since he faces none of the difficulties which haunt other pianists.

They say he is like Horowitz. He is not. Horowitz was an electric furnace, white-hot from inside. Mamikonian remains warm, human and rather paternal. He is the husband of the piano and all instruments will surely love him. He has the gift of sustenance.

What he offered was an exciting *Gaspard de la nuit* of Ravel which laid out his physical qualities and a great variety of tone. Mamikonian is visual. He offered true opulence with the sheer dash and total command of Ravel's difficult notes.

Chopin was the surprise of the concert. Mamikonian erased the elegiac element and the *morbidezza* usual for playing Chopin. Could this fresh, witty, almost mannered stuff be Chopin? It was, and continued to be humorous through till the end of the three pieces with the awful *Grande Polonaise brillante op 22*, which flashed like a Roman carnival. It was new Chopin, not the same old salon stuff.

Then came the Armenian composer Arno Babadjanian in tonal, then a dodecaphonic mood. The player rather dismissed the tonal, but flew into the dodec with relish.

Liszt ended the concert. First the *Funérailles*, with its fine old fashioned operatic aria sections and then came what are called the horrendous, deliberately sadistic difficulties of Liszt's *Rhapsodie Espagnole*. You must have the lot for this. You need four hands and an interior dynamo to sustain the sheer speed at which it must be played. This young player produced everything needed, and the recital blazed to an end. Nothing to do but watch the show, and the musical feeling was correct.

Chamber music and strings pure are fine, but one does need a bit of splendour occasionally. Mamikonian as well as the CSO's Mahler gave it. Cairo has had a weekend long to remember.

Sixth Anniversary Gala Concert; Akhnaton Chamber Orchestra; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 5 April

Yet another celebration was the Akhnaton Chamber Orchestra's 6th birthday concert. Items were offered, but then cancelled, leaving the party in some disarray.

The opening was Handel, well played. Then Gluck and Fauré were sung by Nevine Allouba. Sherif Mohie El-Din always these days stresses the fine tone of the orchestra at the expense of excitement.

There was a lot of Mozart. The first Mozart of the evening was the *Violin Concerto KV 218* with Mahmoud Osman as soloist. The performance, the tone of which was set by him, was prim and rather pedantic. Pleasant music-making, but hardly joyful. The party atmosphere was missing.

Then came Sherif Mohie El-Din's own composition of his setting of the last poems of Amal Donqol for orchestra and soprano voice with Allouba as the soloist. She is adept at these songs, catching irony and a sharply critical outlook with asperity. Particularly good was the half spoken intoned conversation with eternity which ended the selection. These songs should be recorded. They have genuine authority and singable melodies.

Mozart's *Concerto for Flute, Harp and Orchestra in C major KV 299* with Wolfgang Lindenthal, flute, and Manal Mohie El-Din, harp, saved the evening. Flute and harp were speedy, incisive and quite festive. Richard Edlinger, conductor for the second half of the concert, knows how to spread conviviality and played host to the best section of the evening. Manal Mohie El-Din played on a most elegant and glowingly golden harp, and played it in a grand manner.

The ending was — more Mozart. He is the sound fill-up for party nights. The *Symphony in A major KV 201* did the trick. This was dispatched by orchestra and Edlinger at full speed with shiny Mozart resolutions. At least the party ended in the right spirit, with a few sparks to spare from the passing bush fires.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Fabrizio Clerici
Akhnaton Gallery, Centre of Art, 1 Al-Maahad Al-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 5.30pm-9.30pm. Until 14 April.
Oils, watercolours, mixed media and lithographs by a surrealist in the tradition of de Chirico.

Collective Exhibition (Calligraphy)
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 16 April, exc 5-11 April.

Olmedo Quimbita
Cairo Opera House Gallery, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. Daily 9am-9pm. Until 18 April.
Paintings by the Ecuadorian artist.

Wahib Nassar (Paintings)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 23 April.

Ahmed Badawy (Jewelery) & **Ahmed Ragab Sakr** (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, Al-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 23 April.

Maja Fredricsson (Installations)
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12 noon-3pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 24 April.

Jewelery Designs by Artists
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Until 25 April.
Silver and gold jewelery encrusted with precious and semi-precious stones designed by Italian painters and sculptors.

Christian de Portzampare (Architectonic Studies)
Al-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am-10pm. Until 26 April.

Linda Cohn-Kobelecky (Paintings)
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 6373. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 30 April.

Gerhard Altenbourg (Drawings, woodcuttings, watercolours and lithographes)
Gallery of the Faculty of Fine Arts, 8 Ismail Mohamed St, Zamalek. Opening 15 April, 7pm. Daily 10am-2pm & 4pm-7pm. Until 30 April.

Jack Kilby (Photographs)
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 7 May.
Works under the title Arab Jerusalem in the Shadows of the Noble Sanctuary.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
Permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar.

FILMS

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.
11 April, 7pm: **Storie di Ordinaria Follia**. Directed by Ferreri (1981).
12 April, 7pm: **La Classe Operaia Va In Paradiso**. Directed by Petri (1971).

The Witman Boys
Goethe Institute, 5 Al-Bostan St, Downtown. 14 April, 6.30pm.
Directed by János Szász (1996).

Agatha et Les Lectures Illimitées
French Cultural Centre, 1 Madraset Al-Hoqouq Al-Ferensiva St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 15 April, 8pm.
By Marguerite Duras.

Notice:
Some commercial cinemas now change their programmes every Wednesday, others every Monday. The information provided is valid at the time of going to press. It is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For more information, contact the venue.

Dantella (Lace)
*Drive In, entrance of Al-Shorouq City, Cairo-Ismailia desert road. Tel 012-219 0531. Daily 6pm, 9.30pm & midnight. **Ramsis Hilton I**, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm. **Tiba I**, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. **Normandy**, 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. **Odeon I**, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. **Al-Salam**, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. **Cairo Sheraton**, Al-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. **Metro**, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Cosmos I**, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Roxy**, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Sphinx**, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. **Karim II**, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.*

El-Batal (The Hero)
*Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Karim I**, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Renaissance**, World Trade Centre, Corniche Al-Nil, Maspero. Tel 580 4039. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Tiba II**, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. **Ramsis Hilton II**, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. **Cosmos II**, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **El-Haram**, Al-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Radio**, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Diana**, 17 Al-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 593 4727. Daily, 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Rivoli I**, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.*



Gerhard Altenbourg

Ressala Ila Al-Wali (Message to the Wali)
Odeon III, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Odeon II, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Sa'et El-Enteqam (Time of Revenge)
Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 593 4284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Mogrem Maa Martabet El-Sharaf (A Criminal with High Honours)
Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Tamania Wa Arbe'in Saa Fi Isra'il (48 Hours in Israel)
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm.

DANCE

Nora The Gypsy
Al-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Until 12 April, 8pm.
A dance theatre performance by Diana Calenti.

Les Ballets de Monte Carlo
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 13-17 April, 8pm.
Performing Romeo and Juliet.

MUSIC

National Music Ensemble
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 9 April, 8pm.
Conducted by Salah Ghobashi.

Trumpet Recital
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 10 April, 9pm.
Raouf El-Ganaini performs.

Song Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 11 April, 8pm.
Mona Rafla performs.

Soloists of the Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 12 April, 8pm.
Compositions by Mendelsohn, Bartholdy and Schubert.

Guitar Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 13 April, 8pm.

Tcherepnin Guitar Quartet
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 14 April, 8pm.
Compositions by Haydn, Boccherini and Britten.

Cairo Opera Stars
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 14 April, 7pm.
Iman Moustafa, Hassan Kamy and Reda El-Wakil sing arias from opera Aida with the Cairo Symphony Orchestra.

Dessalin
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset Al-Hoqouq Al-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 14 April, 8pm.
African music.

Chamber Music Concert
Ewart Hall, Main Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 6373. 15 April, 8pm.
The Anima String Quartet performs.

THEATRE

Al-Tayeb Wal-Sherrir (The Good and The Bad)
Al-Salam Theatre, Qasr Al-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily, 10pm.
Yehia El-Fakharani, Sawsan Badr, Mohamed Metwalli and Sayed Azmi perform under the direction of Ahmed Abdel-Halim, in a play scripted by Alfred Farag with songs written by Gamal Bekhit.

Alabanda
Al-Fardous Theatre, Al-Beoath Sq. Tel 482 3017. Daily 8.30pm; Thur 9.30pm.
With bellydancer Dina, Mona Abdel-Ghani, Sherif Mounir, Mohamed Heneidi, Alaa Waleieddin, Magda Zaki, Magda Zaki, Ahmed El-Saqqa, Ahmed Aql and Hani Ramzi.

LECTURES

L'Invention de l'Orientalisme en Inde (1780-1830)
CEDEJ, 14 Dr Abdel-Rahman Al-Sawi St (ex-Gam'eyet Al-Nisr) Mohandessin. Tel 361 1932. 14 April, 5pm.
Lecture in French by Roland Lardinos, EHESS.

The Finding of The Oldest Manuscript of the Diwan of Ibn Al-Fared: Studies and Researches
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 15 April, 7pm.
Lecture by Giuseppe Scattolin.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Theatre

Algeria according to Fellag

Leila Hessini tells of a humorist who makes us laugh so we can weep

The small theatre of Le Café de la Musique in Paris is sold-out and long lines are waiting in hope of being allowed to squeeze in next to someone or find a place on the staircase. The audience is diverse — primarily North African and French — across different generations. We are all waiting for Fellag. The Algerian humorist comes out on stage clad in a black hat pulled down to his eyes, red suspenders and a black and white polka-dotted shirt. His facial expressions and gestures match his eclectic attire. In case we had any doubts he is here to make us laugh.

Fellag's one-man sketches are about "the act of digging" into Algeria's past and present. He digs to uncover the reasons — contemporary and historic — and possible responses to Algeria's tragedy. In the process of digging he uncovers the absurd, the contradictions of Algerian society, and ultimately reveals our own and Algeria's humanity.

In one sketch he describes the experience of one Algerian, Mohamed, who went to France for the first time. As soon as he arrived, he looked for a disco, where he could dance and liberate himself, a disco different from those in Algeria where "there are 200 men in mustaches. If you dance with a woman at 11:30, a report will be sent at 11:45 to the Minister of Internal Security." Mohamed begins dancing with a French woman and the dreaded question is raised. "Where are you from" she asks. "Um, um.....why don't you guess?" "Spain?" "It's not too far." "Italy?" "Non-exactemento." "Jewish?" "They are cousins." He finally has to admit that he is from Algeria. This does not, however, diminish the interest the young French woman has in him. By the end of the evening she proclaims "I love you!" Mohamed had never heard anyone say this in Algeria before and could only respond citing verbatim what he had read in a French book: "Me too, I love you," he whispered.

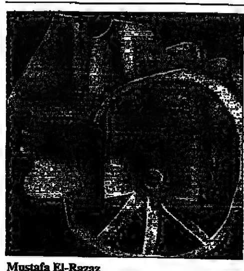
Fellag sees the inability of Algerians to express love as one of the main causes of the Algerian tragedy: "We have a deficit of love but an excess of affection." When a minister of the Algerian government asks Fellag about why nothing works in Algeria, his answer is: "Algeria doesn't *function because of the separation between men and women. The lack of love provokes the erection of kalachnikovs.*"

According to Fellag, the only future for young Algerians is "exile, death or *el-hita* (the wall)". In the latter case Fellag is referring to the phenomenon of "hittists", youth who have nothing to do all day, and no where to go because of the housing crisis, but "to hold up the wall." The wall for Fellag is the only Algerian cultural centre — no other places of distraction exist. "At dusk when the hittist goes home, he takes the wall with him."

Algeria's tragedy, which has lasted six long years, is becoming increasingly barbaric, cruel and absurd. As the horror increases, our immune system develops and we are no longer able to see, hear, feel or even care about the human suffering of Algerians. We say we do not understand and therefore cannot respond.

While news on Algeria has come primarily from journalists and state officials who focus on Algerian deaths, Fellag talks about Algerian life. He reminds us of what some of us never knew, and others have forgotten — the humanity of Algerians. Through his humor, Fellag ambushes our emotions. Caught off guard, we are exposed to our genuine feelings and our consciousness is raised. It is a point of no return and we are transformed. Maybe if we can laugh, we can weep. And if we weep, our humanity has returned and we should be able to react against the unthinkable and unacceptable silent suffering of the Algerian people.

Around the galleries



Mustafa El-Razaz

TWO years have elapsed since **Mustafa El-Razaz** has had an exhibition, but now four galleries at the **Centre of Art** in **Zamalek** are given over to his most recent work. This vast exhibition includes 30 iron, brass and bronze sculptures, 20 lithographs, an installation, and over 80 mixed media paintings.

The gallery attached to the **Cairo Library** hosts wood sculptures by **Mohamed Moussa**. Strange forms with a superb finish.

Paintings, 22 in all, conceived as 11 "dualities", by **Esmat Dawestashi** are on show at the **Art Appreciation Palace, Alexandria**. Both portray and transfigure (through bold primary colours and rhythmic composition) the harsh realities with which late 20th century man is faced. Also in Alexandria, at the **Alexandria Atelier**, are 60 elegant bronze and brass medallions by **Mohamed Shonkri**.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

Theory and praxis revisited

In the first instalment of a lecture delivered in Cairo last month, **Jürgen Habermas** examines the changing place of philosophy in the Modern world

I would first like to remind you of the two answers which classical Greek philosophy gives to the question of the role philosophy should play in the broader context of education, politics and culture. The main answers are connected with the works of Plato and Aristotle (1). The classical perception of the relation between theory and praxis has, of course, changed with the change in how philosophy sees itself. Under the conditions of modern, more or less post-metaphysical thought, contractualist theories of natural law and philosophies of history have led to a different interpretation of the relation of theory and praxis. The main interpretations are again connected with two names, Hegel and Marx (2). But the dashed political expectations that were associated with these modern answers have, as far as I can see, prompted diametrically opposed responses in our times. On the one hand, there has been a renewed turn to a metaphysical or quasi-religious understanding of what philosophy can achieve. This is exemplified by Heidegger and some of his postmodern followers. On the other hand, the disappointment has led to a sobered philosophy relativising its public functions within the frame of complex societies (3). This more modest understanding of philosophy goes hand in hand with the specification of various roles which philosophy can assume in the context of a culture shaped by science, in a society characterised by functional differentiation, and vis-à-vis the members of such societies, each of whom more and more feel the strong pressure to lead their own individual lives (4). I shall in conclusion turn to the more influential role of the public intellectual through which any attempt to promote what Kant once called "enlightenment" is channelled in the public sphere (5).

-1-

The Platonic answer to the question of the possible practical impact of philosophy can be put in a nutshell: nothing is more practical than theory itself. Plato believed that, in the final instance, immersing oneself in contemplation of the cosmos was of religious as well as of epistemic importance. Theory promotes a formation process that provides a route *to both knowledge and salvation. Theory triggers a* catharsis which is expected to lead to a salvaging conversion of the mind. For in ascending to the heights of ideas, the soul is purged of lower interests and passions. In that ascent to a noetic grasp of ideas, the soul detaches itself from its material shackles and liberates itself from the prison-house *of the body. The Ancient Greeks, consequently,* took the wise man who devoted his life to contemplation as a model worthy of veneration.

In the Aristotelian and the Stoic traditions the *bios theoretikos* claims priority as well — the *vita contemplative* enjoys a place higher than any kind of *vita activa.*

However, unlike the figures of the itinerant preacher, the hermit and the monk, the wise man represents a path to salvation that is exclusive and can only be trodden by a few educated persons. If only, because of this elitist touch, the public impact of philosophy could not keep pace with the world religions promising salvation for the masses. Thus, as of late classical antiquity, Greek philosophy entered into a close symbiosis with institutional Christianity, became more and more the scholarly organ of theology, and forfeited its own independent promise of salvation. Books with titles such as *De consolatione philosophiae* became increasingly rare, while monotheistic religions relieved philosophy of the task of providing both consolation and moral education. In Europe, it was now the Church which helped people cope with existential distress, poverty, illness and death. Meanwhile, philosophy, as the place-holder of worldly reason, increasingly withdrew into the domain of its cognitive tasks and, in good Aristotelian manner, understood theory as the path to knowledge rather than salvation.

Aristotle had already found a different answer to the question of the practical impact of philosophy: theory, he claimed, received a practical significance only in the guise of practical philosophy, while this part of philosophy, detached from theory in the strict epistemic sense, specialises in questions on how one can most prudently lead one's life. Ethical reasoning, in the Aristotelian sense of phronesis, forgoes three classical claims of theory. Firstly, profane instructions on how to lead a good life now take the place of a promise of a religious kind of salvation. Secondly, such a reasonable orientation for our daily life does not have the same certainly as knowledge secured by theory. Practical philosophy serves the purpose of prudence, not science. And, finally, ethical insights are now no longer reinforced by the motivating context of the information process of a theoretical mode of life. Instead, ethics has to presume that its properly socialised addressees can already look back on successful character development. Philosophy can only teach how to pursue the good life to those people who have already acquired an intuitive knowledge of what a good life means.

Under the modern conditions of post-metaphysical thought, when ontological and theological background assumptions became more and more controversial, practical philosophy goes one step further and sacrifices even its contents. For, in view of what is now considered as a legitimate plurality of world views, modern ethical reasoning is no longer able to justify particular models for a successful life and *recommend them* as examples to be imitated. With Rawls, we might say, that in liberal societies everyone has the right to develop and pursue their own conception of the good, or, more cautiously, of a life that is not misspent. On this premise, ethics (in the Aristotelian sense of teaching how to live a good live) must limit itself to the more formal aspects of the basic question of who *I am and would* like to be, and what is good for me, in the long run. Since Kierkegaard, therefore, ethics has assumed the form of existential philosophy that can only explain the conditions and modalities of a conscious or authentic way of leading one's life. If philosophical ethics assumes *the* Neo-Aristotelian form of hermeneutics, it investigates how people clarify their self-understanding by appropriating traditions. If it assumes the form of a discourse theory of ethics, it traces the argumentational processes that are necessary in order to attain a clear view of one's own identity. Since Kierkegaard, the modern varieties of ethics — in the classical sense of a *guidance* for life-projects — have ceased to articulate publicly recognised models of exemplary life; they have, instead, advised private individuals to opt for a specific form of reflection in order to lead an authentic life of one's own choice.

-2-

Once the classical alliance of ethics and politics breaks down, genuine modern *forms* of political and moral theory develop with contractualism and a de-ontological approach in the Kantian style. They replace the ethical or political question of what is good for me, or for us, in the long run, with the moral and legal-political question as to the justice of shared practices that are equally good for everybody. Such norms are considered "just" if they are in the equal interest of everybody and may, therefore, expect the unforced intersubjective recognition of all reasonable subjects.

Meanwhile, the concept of an "objective reason" embodied, either in nature or in world history, had become transformed into a notion of "subjective reason", as a mental capacity of individual actors. All participants are conceived as free and equal actors who wish themselves, i.e. to establish regulations autonomously for their common life. Kant and Rousseau construe "autonomy" as the ability to tie one's own will to laws, and only to those universal laws which deserve to be adopted because they are equally good for *everybody.* In terms of this egalitarian universalism, philosophy derived highly explosive ideas "solely from reason". Hegel was ready to claim that the French Revolution *"was kindled by* philosophy". He believed that with the contractualist tradition of natural law, philosophy had raised the hitherto unprecedented claim "that Man places *himself* on *his head*, that is on his thoughts, and constructs reality according to them." In this vein the inner link between modern natural law and revolution spawns still another answer to our initial question: the just society, which philosophy anticipates in thought, should be realised through "revolutionary" praxis. Yet this relation between theory and praxis as it was conceived by Marx, has meanwhile also become deeply problematical.

This is, if we focus on the conceptual, not the empirical links, due to the instrumental role a philosophy of history, as it was developed during the 18th century. Those teleological concepts of history offered themselves to compensate the weakness inherent in the normativism of modern natural law. This is not to belittle the continuing relevance of straight normative constructions of a "just community", justified by reason. In light of such ideas it is possible to denounce existing injustice and call, politically, for more legitimate institutions. However, those normative constructions, while explaining what should be the case, do not say anything about how, what we ought to bring about, is actually to be implemented in praxis. In this context Hegel spoke scornfully of the *"Ohnmacht des Sollen"* ("the impotence of the mere 'ought'"). Therefore, it seemed plausible to scan history for tendencies that, as it were, would naturally buttress those normative ideas. As a consequence of a new, future-oriented historical consciousness, this sphere had been instilled with meaning and relevance, so that history, first of all, attracted the interest of philosophy. Kant took up this issue of the "realisation of Reason in history" and Hegel, moreover, transposed the transhistorical operations of Reason, as such, into the process concepts of a genesis of Reason that was now understood as giving structure to history as well as to nature.

With his dialectical philosophy of history Hegel tried to bridge the gap between the normativity of abstract reason and unreasonable social and historical circumstances. While for Kant the moral praxis of cooperating individuals had merely been encouraged by a philosophy of history, Hegel developed an encompassing conception of world history. Yet, in view of the logic of world-historical processes, in a way fixed in advance, some famous students of Hegel's felt challenged to create space for a form of praxis which they could again attribute to the historically acting subjects themselves. Both fascinated and repelled by their mentor's system, Feuerbach and Marx rejected the idealist form of philosophy — but wished to retain its rational contents. They now wanted to abolish a sublate philosophy in order to realise it — not, like Kant, through individual moral action but by political means. So they finally turned the classical relationship of theory and praxis upside down.

Theory was now to take the stage in a double guise — as false consciousness and as critique. In both respects philosophy is embedded in the praxis *of a particular social context and remains dependent* on it. While critical theory tries to uncover the context-dependency of a traditional theory that only imagined itself to be independent of any historical conditions, this critique becomes aware of its own social roots. And gazing in the mirror of the context of its own historical genesis, it also discovers the addressee who can be spurred on to a liberating praxis by means of the critical insight the self-reflexive theory wished now to provide.

Thus Marx transposed Hegel's theory into an economic critique intended to trigger the practical overthrow of the capitalist foundations of society. He understood such praxis as the simultaneous sublation and realisation of philosophy. But it was long before the failure of the monstrous Soviet Russian experiment and the decomposition of the Empire that this exuberant thought was proved wrong. This version of theory becoming praxis had also been criticised within Western Marxism itself.



photo: Sherif Sonbol

"A genuinely modern vision of philosophy, which wishes to keep one of its feet in science and academia and which is not willing to escape the fallibilist consciousness of any academic enterprise, is forced to drop the claim of holding the key to the Truth..."

Allow me to address only three points in this regard.

Criticism was leveled first at the underlying assumptions of a materialist history of philosophy that had, in fact, not broken with the totalising thrust of metaphysics but had merely transposed the teleological figures of thought from nature onto history as a whole. Meanwhile, however, the fallibilist self-understanding of science had reached philosophy, too, stimulating the awareness that the structural changes in history can no longer be construed as manifesting some invisible hand. The critique, has, secondly, targeted the projection of macro-subjects onto the screen of world history. Concepts for collective actors such as "social class", "culture", "people", or *"Volksgeist"* ("popular spirit") intimate something like out-sized subjects. However, the divergent beliefs and conflicting intentions of different individuals can reasonably be integrated only through intersubjective processes of communication and deliberation. Political intervention in critical social developments, therefore, depends on democratic opinion and will formation. The avantgardist project of social revolution has, thirdly, attracted a critique of the over-inflated claims of the criticising Reason itself. The interest in getting control over history, as if the inherently contingent and largely inaccessible web of historical events were a second nature had unfortunately replaced the well-taken moral impulse to liberate mankind from the repetitive compulsions of a repressed history of suffering. The conception of a praxis, informed by so-called "laws of history", overrides the boundaries of the finite human mind and fails to pay due respect to the pluralist constitution of a form of praxis that is fueled by the "yes" and "no" of communicatively acting subjects. It conflates the intersubjectively performed praxis of socialised individuals with the technical interventions of a collective subject only asserting itself.

-3-

So, the young-Hegelian urge for theory to become practical only mirrors another aspect of what Horkheimer and Adorno have called instrumental reason. Is, in other words, the modern question as to how philosophy can become practical perhaps wrongly put in the first place? It would be somewhat hasty, I think, to jump to this conclusion.

In view of a philosophy which is today reduced to only one among other academic disciplines, most of us still have the irritating sensation that there is somehow lacking an essential element. It is hard to deny the intuition, at least, that a philosophy regressing into the self-sustaining discourses of an academic discipline is no longer philosophy in the proper sense of the word. It is not so much the absence of totalising concepts, of speculation about nature and history as a whole, that appears to be a shortcoming. In modernity, particularly given the *disasters of the 20th century, some metaphysical* meaning disclosed by reason appears to have been irrevocably lost. What a philosophy, that has shrunk to the size of an academic discipline lacks is something else — namely, a perspective from which its statements can gain the power to provide orientation in life.

After the fiasco of a theory which, evidently, became practical in the wrong way, the Kantian distinction between scholarly and worldly philosophy — *"Schul-und Weltphilosophie"* — is emerging in a new form. Those exoteric approaches which have the advantage of not trying to reply exclusively to *self-created problems*, defined by and emerging from philosophical discussion itself, can easily be distinguished from the highly specialised business of a remote discipline. Exoteric approaches, e.g. in the wake of Nietzsche, have a public impact, because they square up to the problems which confront philosophy from outside, that is, from both private and public life. These diagnostic approaches respond to the particular need of a Modernity which is, after all, bereft of any guidance by models of the past. For Modernity has to reach a normative understanding of itself by its own devices. The philosophical discourse on Modernity is a terrain occupied both by its defendants and by its post-modern critiques, such as Karl Popper, Hans Blumenberg, or Karl-Otto Apel on one side, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Richard Rorty on the other. Here is not the appropriate place to go into the controversy over who has the better arguments. However, in view of what we may expect philosophy can bring about today, I find another tension that has arisen in the context of this debate, interesting. Let me put this in scene as an opposition between a quasi-religious and a more pragmatic self-understanding of philosophy.

Following Nietzsche, Heidegger has construed the history of Western civilisation and society to reflect an underlying conceptual history of Platonism and Hellenised Christianity. That is to say, he has deconstructed the history of metaphysics in order to "overcome" the humanistic self-understanding of modern man. According to his critique of the modern condition, a new attitude of serenity should take the place of the possessive individualism of a subjectivity that is only asserting itself. At the same time Heidegger assigns to the enterprise of this critique of metaphysics a mission, which is reminiscent of the original religious meaning of contemplation. However, the philosophical "remembrance" of Being is not so much to revive an anamnesis of ideas in the service of some personal salvation; it is intended to "overcome" an imminent apocalyptic fate of mankind. While promoting this "apocalyptic attentism" Heidegger appropriates the gesture of the chosen thinker who possesses privileged access to the epiphany of truth. He believes that a mystically tinged form of anamnestic thought has the magical and harrying power to accelerate, in an indirect way, the pending salvation of the Occident. In this vein the "thinker" is supposed to counter-balance the fate of a God-forsaken Modernity. Marxism once had endeavoured to secure its relation to world history by means of revolutionary praxis. Heidegger preserves, for philosophy, a similarly fateful reference to the meta-history of Being, by a kind of pseudo-religious upgrading of the spiritual powers of the chosen thinker.

Thus philosophy continues to bear the fate of the world on its shoulders. Here, a strand of the Platonist tradition persists, one incompatible with the Modern turn towards an egalitarian universalism. A genuinely modern vision of philosophy, which wishes to keep one of its feet in science and academia and which is not willing to escape the fallibilist consciousness of any academic enterprise, is forced to drop the claim of holding the key to the Truth (what Arnold Gehlen once called the *"Schlusselattitude"* of the mandarins). To the extent that philosophy still tries to provide orientation in life, it must do so in a less dramatic manner. At this end of the spectrum, philosophy arrives at a more modest, a pragmatic self-understanding, locating itself in the differentiated orders of modern societies. Philosophy thus abandons the attitude of presenting itself as a pretentious countervailing power against the entire Modern world. Instead, it now tries to place itself within this world which it, at the same time, is to interpret, and to do this in such a way that it can take on various functionally differentiated roles and make specific contributions to different audiences.

This lecture is printed with the special permission of Jurgen Habermas. The second instalment of 'Theory and praxis revisited' will be published next week.

Plain Talk

It was not love but culture in a cold climate. The average temperature in Stockholm was between one and minus one when the city hosted the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development. The conference lasted for four days *from 30 March to 2 April but* what was said and discussed would actually fill tomes. The importance of the conference was shown by the fact that dozens of ministers of culture participated, with some delegations comprising 45 members. The Egyptian delegation, which I had the honour and pleasure of joining, had 18 members headed by Mohamed Ghoneim, first under-secretary at the Ministry of Culture. But together with the official, governmental delegation, were a number of specialists in different fields.

It would be difficult, almost impossible, to give even a bird's eye view of everything that went on during the conference, but there were some highlights that deserve a mention. I had the pleasant task of being one of three panelists during the *forum on improving international cooperation for cultural policy*. The forum was headed by Mohamed Ghoneim, who showed real mastery in conducting discussions. Other members of *our delegation attended the* meeting and made some interesting and useful interventions. The three panelists, Dr Higgins, former minister of culture of Ireland, a first speaker, Mr Weber from the Council of Europe, and myself dealt with the subject from different angles.

Globalisation offers better possibilities for cooperation but it tends to lead to subtle cultural invasion. Culture has to be given priority, a new ethic is needed and economy should be instrumental; cultural cooperation should be a two-way process based on confidence in our own culture and on the openness of other cultures; it should include cooperation in education, training, and communication. The institutional mechanisms of cultural cooperation have to be renewed by combining institutional and non-institutional levels as more and more initiatives are taken by networks of people.

The panelists engendered an interesting debate. Over 20 speakers took the floor, informing the meeting about innovative projects such as the House of the Cultures of the World and Culture in the Neighbourhood, a project initiated by Switzerland for interaction with some African countries.

Another forum I could not miss was The Vision of African Cultural Cooperation and Development. This dealt with all aspects of African culture, literature, music, dance and drama. I was happy to see Hassan El-Greitly, the theatre director, among the speakers.

Egypt participated in all forums and angoras: the children's angora was attended by Abdel-Tawab Youssef, a leading writer for children, the Women in Cultural Policies was attended by Dr Hoda Badran, the Musical Diversity and Rights forums were attended by Nagui El-Habashi, the cellist, and Abdel-Rahman El-Khateeb, a music lecturer, both of whom are resident in Sweden.

A forum that I found particularly interesting and valid for us in Egypt was on Creativity and Cultural Industries, chaired by the UK and Jamaica. It discussed the important issue of relations between governments and the private sector. An important issue discussed was the relation between tourism and culture. It was strongly felt that the role of the government is to create the necessary space and climate to help release the creativity of individuals, communities and societies. The perverse effects of tourism, a "mixed blessing" for the development of creativity, were also discussed.

The forum emphasised the need to have a balanced partnership between the public and private sectors, the specialised training of policy makers and government administrators and the protection of the rights of creators.

The conference was, indeed, a cultural banquet, with so many kinds of savoury dishes. But, as is so often the effect of such banquets, there was always the danger of cultural indigestion!

Mursi Saad El-Din





photos: Salah Ibrahim



High hopes

Mohamed looked at the sun, and noticed that it was well on its downward path. I'll be late for the lesson, he thought, and, having checked the donkey's tether, he began to run across the field, his *galabiya* flapping in the wind, his bare feet scarcely touching the soft clumps of earth.

He only slowed down when he came in full view of the big house and forced himself to breathe regularly. Soon his heart stopped pounding and he was able to slip silently through an opening in the hedge only he knew about. Mohamed did not look at the tidy garden with its colourful flowerbeds, although it was considered an incredible luxury in the village, the symbol of the *umda*'s superior status.

He had been right. The lesson had already started. He could hear *Ustadh* Abdel-Rahman announcing the beginning of the dictation. He quickly broke a twig from the hedge and, checking its sturdiness, positioned himself in his usual place, under one of the first-floor windows. With his foot, he cleared a space in the dust then squatted, ready to trace the letters painstakingly, as he heard the words distinctly uttered by the *ustadh* for the benefit of Mursi, the *umda*'s son. Mursi had not been doing too well at school and his father had hired *Ustadh* Abdel-Rahman, the village schoolteacher, to help him with his homework.

Mohamed had found out about the lessons one day by chance, as he was preparing to enter, unnoticed, the *umda*'s garden to shinny up the mulberry tree and pick some of the deliciously ripe, hairy, white berries. Just then he had heard a man shouting and calling Mursi a donkey. Mohamed had forgotten about the berries and peeked, concealed by the branches, into the first-floor window. There, he had seen Mursi, sitting sulkily at the *umda*'s desk, twirling a pencil in his fingers; the school teacher was leaning over him, urging him on. At once Mohamed understood that Mursi was being initiated into the mysterious art of writing. A strange feeling overcame him, a mixture of burning curiosity and jealousy. Mohamed knew *Ustadh* Abdel-Rahman. The teacher had stopped him once on his way to the water pump to ask him why he never came to school. Frightened, the boy had taken to his heels, clutching his empty bucket, without telling the *ustadh* that his family needed him to work in the fields, but that he was dying to go to school. Seeing him now, leaning over Mursi, Mohamed regretted his haste. He reflected that the teacher did not look like an evil man. Maybe he could have talked his father into letting him go to school, and Mohamed might have been able to realise his most secret dream, that of becoming a government employee, exactly like Hamdi Effendi, who worked for the water company and came home every evening in his dark suit, a newspaper neatly tucked under his arm.

Mohamed had waited for Mursi that day and, when the little boy finally appeared in the garden, he had pounced on him, pinning him to the ground. Mursi was plump and white and never wore *galabiyas*. In a muffled voice, he had begged Mohamed to let go of him: his mother would kill him, he had wailed, if he dirtied his shirt. "Promise to tell me what you were doing in there with the schoolteacher," Mohamed had hissed in his ear. Mursi had promised, and, having dusted himself off furiously, had broken a twig from the hedge, just like the one Mohamed was holding between his fingers now, and traced a few signs in the fine sand of the alley. From that day on, Mohamed had stood under the window every time *Ustadh* Abdel-Rahman came to the big house for the lesson.

The boy was totally absorbed, listening to the teacher's voice, then carefully tracing the letters on the ground, making sure that the dots were positioned correctly, when a large shadow loomed over his handiwork. He stood up slowly to face the *umda*'s wife. She was observing him silently. Mohamed could not bring himself to say he was sorry, because he knew that he was not. He just absentmindedly wiped the letters away, one by one, with his bare toe, all the while twisting the end of his *galabiya* nervously in his fingers. The woman finally extended her hand. "Come along," she said, and, pushing him lightly, led him inside the house. "Here, *Ustadh* Abdel-Rahman, you have a second pupil now," she told the teacher, and left.

That night, Mohamed dreamed that he was returning home in a suit and a crisp white shirt, carrying an enormous newspaper under his arm.

Fayza Hassan

Dreams for sale



Last week, Givenchy's spring/summer 1998 haute couture collection was presented, along with the house's latest perfume, *Extravagance*, to a selected — and enthralled — public. **Fayza Hassan** basked in a whiff of Parisian elegance

The guests gathering in the ballroom of the Ramses Hilton are not representative of the public one traditionally associates with a fashion show, or, for that matter, the launching of a perfume called Extravagance. There is no sign of the excess at which the perfume may hint, only exquisitely subdued elegance among the members of the Inner Wheel Club, who organised the event. All is as it should be, and there is no need for even a frisson of guilt: the proceeds will be distributed among several charities under the auspices of Mrs Suzanne Mubarak.

The women, in perfectly tailored dresses and suits, most in sober black or navy blue, look more like top professionals than frivolous little things come to ooh and aah at Alexander McQueen's daring creations.

Youssra, in a strict two-piece suit, no make-up, has slipped discreetly, almost unnoticed, to her table. Impeccably dressed men are discussing business. Good taste reigns supreme, down to the tasteful bouquets on the individual tables. "Pity about the music," murmurs Etienne de Swardt, the young international manager of Givenchy Perfumes. "What is wrong with it?" asks the commercial attaché of the French Embassy. "It's fit for the circus," says Etienne. "Can they turn the loudspeakers down?" Apparently they can't, but the conversation proceeds gaily over the din. "Have you seen the collection?" asks the ravishing Caroline Grouvel, director of haute couture at Givenchy. "Only briefly, on television," says someone. "It is one of his best; such a gifted young man." The gifted young man is Alexander McQueen, of course, appointed artistic director of haute couture and ready-to-wear for Givenchy in 1996 — the very same year, as the tastefully exuberant programme informs us, he received the British Designer of the Year award from the British Fashion Council.

McQueen's family, we learn, courtesy of the luxurious brochure, "descends from the French tradition of weavers and drapers dating from the late 18th century. When the Huguenots left France to seek refuge in London, the McQueen family participated in the rebirth of the textile industry in England." Young Alexander was born in London in 1969 and, at the age of 16, began his career on Saville Row, "starting at Anderson and Shepherd and continuing at Gieves and Hawkes," where he worked on custom-made jackets and suits for the likes of the Prince of Wales and Lord Rothschild, meanwhile acquiring a master's degree at St Martin's School of Art in 1992.

From persecution, then, to pinstripes — all in the space of two brief centuries. He then moved to the theatre costumers Barmans and Nathans, where he learned different cutting techniques. He went on to work with designer Koji Tatsuno, and on to Milan, where he continued to acquire more experience with Romeo Gigli.

Alexander McQueen's collection is all that one can expect, under such exhilarating circumstances, and much more. The music stops suddenly and, in the awed silence that ensues, a few exotic notes are heard. Japanese screens have been raised on the stage, and the shadows of three models, rendered even more eerily lean by the lighting effects, appear. More tinkling chimes, and they reveal themselves, proceeding along the catwalk. Their faces are those of shop mannequins, all electric-blue eyeshadow and plasticine foundation, their heads clad in straight, irregularly scissored wigs in neon red, aubergine, platinum and auburn.

These are not women at all, but walking coathangers: every designer's dream. No individual characteristics deter from the stunning, superbly original creations — for these are not mere dresses. These are symbols with sharp hip-bones, not women. They are the handmaidens of fashion, here to serve it, not be enhanced by it. When one of the models stumbles in her high stiletto heels, one is relieved to discover that they are, in fact, human. More exquisite shapes waver behind the screen: more extremely tall, bewigged girls descend the steps majestically, each in a breathtaking, hand-sewn and often delicately hand-embroidered masterpiece. There are many tiny beads, beautiful lace and sheer veil, and Asian allure. The public is silent, straining to take it all in. It is all very sophisticated and daring, but never fussy, never vulgar.

Even the few garments featuring rather important décolletage are ethereal, works of art to be displayed and simply admired. There is no flesh, only skin. Doing something as mundane as wearing these items would seem sacrilegious.

Can one buy them — assuming, that is, that one could afford them? It is not easy, but arrangements can be made, provided the client is ready to travel to Paris to pick up her treasure.

"This is not about selling dresses," says Brigitte Lefebvre, regional manager for Christian Dior, firmly. "In haute couture, we really sell an image, a dream. Women will not all buy a dress, but they will be tempted by the perfume, maybe, a scarf or a bag, which will make them feel that they own a bit of Dior or Givenchy, that they have the style and belong to an elite."

The guests depart, each bearing a little red and yellow bag containing a bit of the dream: the latest perfume from Givenchy.

Additional reporting by ***Amany Abdel-Moneim***

Sufra Dayma

Fatta with mutton

Ingredients:

3 loaves of pita bread (cut in squares)
1 lamb leg or shoulder (boiled)
2 cups mutton stock
2 cups white rice (cooked)
7 cups yoghurt
1 cup *tahina* (raw)
1/2 cup fresh lemon juice
1 tbsp. crushed garlic
Cooking oil
Butter
Salt + pepper + nutmeg (grated)

Method:

Place the boiled mutton in an oven dish. Season with salt, pepper and nutmeg. Place in a medium preheated oven until golden and crisp. Deep-fry pita bread squares until slightly golden. Place in a large, deep serving bowl. Add the stock after boiling it. Add the cooked rice (hot). Hand-blend the yoghurt, *tahina*, lemon juice and garlic, and add salt to taste. Add a pinch of pepper. Pour this blend over the rice. Melt a small piece of butter and spread on top. Serve hot with the mutton. Sprinkle some fried almonds and pine nuts on top of the *fatta* (optional).

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Sizzling flesh

Andrew Steele and a pair of tongs

A truly remarkable venue, the Hana House, secreted in a corner of the Nile Zamalek Hotel, at the end of Brazil Street. A real Korean restaurant, this, as evidenced by the scores of Korean diners thronging about as we made our entrance. We were shown smartly to a table as meaty smells wafted their pleasant way into our nostrils. We were in for an interesting feast. Little baskets full of glowing embers stood guard at each table. The circular platter called the "Success Roaster" served as a centrepiece: at the Hana House, you do your own cooking.

The menu is large and varied, offering an incomparable range of Korean treats, with stock Chinese and Japanese bits and pieces thrown in for good measure. The choice of cook-it-yourself items is listed in the grill section, which includes Beef Leg, Beef Tail and Beef Trip (sic). We decided to go for broke and ordered soups, spring rolls and a wealth of main courses in order to sate our grumbling innards.

First up, naturally, was a selection of the usual complimentary starters. These were exquisite, and included liquorice-tasting dried black beans and an unusual turnip and potato dish. All prepared with definite élan, all very good indeed. The soups continued the theme of excellence. The hands-down winner here was the masterly shrimp won ton soup, packed full of morsels of delight. It had a big and bouncy bite which smacked of all things fishy. The spring rolls were crisp and tender and packed with a savory vegetable mix which made for heaven in the mouth.

The main courses did not disappoint. We chose pork with Korean hot and spicy, chicken bamboo shoot, pan-broiled vegetables, bean curd with spicy kim chi and beef ribs. First the pork. It came, as one might expect, with the usual melange of shredded vegetables and a faintly sticky sauce. The taste was a wow: the chef deserves a hearty slap on the back. The pork itself was well cooked and tender. A heady dish, if ever there was one. Thoroughly recommended. The bean curd and kim chi was equally wondrous. Warm kim chi with cubes of tofu on the side, waiting to soak up the juices. And soak it did, the texture of the tofu adding a creamy slant to the spicy cabbage mixture. We proclaimed the dish a winner, and wolfed it down accordingly. The vegetables were equally good. The evening's one disappointment was the rather bland chicken bamboo shoot, which, although it hailed from the Chinese section of the menu, lacked the gastronomic savoir-faire of its Korean counterparts. Not bad, but it didn't compare to its illustrious menu mates. And so to the piece de resistance: a large plate of raw meat, a pair of tongs and a pair of scissors, slapped without ceremony onto the periphery of our Success Roaster, which had been fuelled up with coal and was ready to rock and roll. After initial reticence, we got into the sizzle, and snipped and turned, shifted and poked, until it was done to perfection. What a marinade! All in all, great fun and great food, as well as exemplary service. Pay a visit to Hana House the next time you fancy Oriental, and you won't be disappointed. With dinner for four with four Stellas at a value-packed LE154, you, too, can afford to sizzle.

Hana House, the Nile Zamalek Hotel, 21 Al-Maahad Al-Swissri St., Zamalek
Tel: 3419734

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

ACROSS

1. Handle of knife (4)
5. Toboggan (4)
9. Kick out; expropriate (5)
14. Jail ... (4)
15. Housebroken (4)
16. American whose parents were immigrants from Japan (5)
17. Formality; celebration (5)
18. Egg (4)
19. Contamination; poison (5)
20. First lady (3)
21. Health resort (3)
22. Corrida cheer (3)
24. Saints, abb. (3)
25. Middle layer of wall of artery (5)
27. T12:26 threaten; loose one's temper (5)
29. Ancient Grecian music hall (5)
32. Be ravenous; lick one's chops (6)
36. Curvature (3)
39. Obliterates (5)
41. Ruins; embers; sallowness (5)
42. Graceful deer (7)
44. Combiners (7)
46. Gladden (5)
47. Femme fatale; bewitching (5)
49. Affirmative (3)
50. Undress (6)
52. Proportional relationship (5)
54. Mother-of-pearl (5)
56. Hangman's halter (5)
60. Each and every (3)
63. Intimation; prompt; catchword(3)
64. Jostle; canter (3)
66. Reigning king (3)
67. Cubicle or booth (5)
69. Spoke deceptively (4)
71. Some skirts (4)
72. Furious (5)
73. Not working (4)
74. Ancient Greek coin (4)
75. Appointed; christened (5)
76. W. African nut containing caffeine (4)
77. Exhaust; wear out (4)

DOWN

1. Seraglio (5)
2. ... and kicking (5)
3. Doomed to destruction (5)
4. Lace (3)
5. Desist; constrain (4)
6. Volcano molten rock (4)
7. Flightless bird of Australia (3)
8. Evil spirit; malignant supernatural being (5)
9. Amusing; pleasurable (12)
10. Through (3)
11. Goddess of fertility (4)
12. Part of a dime (4)
13. Songbird, pl. (4)
21. Resembling black pig with white stripe across its spine (12)
23. ... Vegas (3)
26. Symbol of "ionium" (2)
27. Weather directions (3)
28. Most recent; in the rear (4)
30. Snake-like fish (3)
31. Rahs (4)
33. S. American flightless bird (4)
34. Exceedingly (4)
35. Existence (4)
36. Old (4)
37. Unhealthy rattling breath (4)
38. Russian ruler of old (4)
40. Chapter of the Koran (4)
43. British college (4)
45. Seine (3)
48. Fury (3)
51. Worthless European coin (3)
53. Comb. Form for "egg" (2)
55. Reminder of times past (5)
57. S. African antelope (5)
58. Spanish gentleman (5)
59. Displaced person; excommunicate (5)
60. Of similar character (4)
61. A European monetary unit (4)
62. Fertile soil (4)
64. Set; take definite form (4)
65. Buildings for musical performance (4)
68. French saint, abb. (3)
70. Artificial language based on Esperanto (3)
71. Witty saying (3)

Last week's solution

Going to the cinema is still a favourite *Eid* pastime, but yesterday's audiences really had it all: stars, song and social realism. Act one of an occasional series

Cinema snapshots

From Spiro Raissi's pioneering ventures to Umm Kulthoum's pet projects, **Fayza Hassan** looks back at the entrepreneurs and artists who made Egyptian cinema what it was



Still from Serpent of the Nile, W. Buonaventura, London, 1994

On a visit to Cairo in 1991, Moroccan filmmaker Momoun Smihi commented that the Arab countries share the history of their literature. In the same way, much of the history of Arab cinema is common to the region rather than specific to any one country.

"In the beginning, you have the birth of cinema in Arab countries, according to the same process, in Rabat, Tunis, Algiers, Cairo, Damascus or Beirut [induced by] the arrival of foreign cinema technicians, French, American... followed soon after by local operators. In Egypt, it was the brothers Lama, Mesguich in Morocco, Sheikh Chicly in Tunisia."

The first filmmakers were cameramen belonging to the generation that invented cinema: the Lumière brothers in France, as well as companies like Pathé and Gaumont. At the beginning of the 20th century, they had covered the Arab world. Then there were the military men and the colonial officials, who needed to document life in the colonies. Although many of these first pictures of a world that seemed so exotic to Europe and America have been lost, one can still find films of Arab cities, tribes and villages produced at the turn of the century. ("Un cinéaste marocain au Caire", interview with Jean-Charles Depaule, *Egypte/Monde Arabe 8*, 1991).

The first attempts at local filmmaking can be traced to 1917, but little came of these beginnings. Foreign films were already starting to offer an attractive alternative to theatre-goers, although investing in cinema was a venture fraught with danger. Taki Raissi, son of the "king of Egyptian cinema", Spiro Raissi, recounts his father's rocky beginnings:

"When my father finished school in the early '20s, he did not wish to become a bank employee like my uncles. He was looking around for a promising business venture when he heard by chance that Cinema Olympia was up for lease. The idea of taking it over appealed to him. He consulted his brothers, who declared him certifiable. He knew nothing about the business, they told him: how could he hope to compete in a market of which he was totally ignorant? My father insisted, however, and eventually convinced his brothers to leave their cushy jobs and join him in the adventure."

The Raissi brothers took over the lease and started showing all the films they liked themselves. It was an unmitigated disaster. After a number of resounding flops, quarrels erupted between the brothers, the older ones furious at having been talked into leaving the bank, and insisting that Spiro find someone who would take the lease off their hands. Spiro was about to give in to their urgent supplication, when a fortune-teller warned him not to give up something that was just about to bring him great profits, if he could only manage to hang on a little longer. He had a serious talk with his brothers and they finally decided to give it one last try. "This time," says Taki, "they did not rely on their own taste in films, but observed what was going on in some of the other cinemas playing to a full house." Action films seem to be the popular thing. They selected a Western which they hated; it was an instant success. Soon they were leasing a second cinema, the Metropole.

Having hit on the golden formula, they never looked back, adding the Diana, the Rex (which belonged to the Shepheard's Hotel), the Paradis and, finally, the jewel of the crown, the Royal, which they built on leased land (the cinema was to revert to the landowners after 20 years) and which featured an electrically-powered roof which was opened in the summer.

"When my father finished school in the early '20s, he did not wish to become a bank employee like my uncles. He was looking around for a promising business venture when he heard by chance that Cinema Olympia was up for lease. The idea of taking it over appealed to him. He consulted his brothers, who declared him certifiable"

All in all, the Raissi brothers were managing seven cinemas, two of which were open-air venues. Spiro, however, had not believed in their good fortune at first, and had never planned for the long term. As the lease periods on the various cinemas came to an end, he was unable to renew them. Even the Royal, which had been built by the Raissis, had to be relinquished at the end of the 20-year term.

Pierre Zarpanelli, another Egyptian Greek, had even more modest beginnings, although he showed the same pioneering spirit. Zarpanelli had toured the Egyptian villages as a salesman when he hit on the idea of bringing the cinema to the countryside. He loaded rented equipment onto a small truck and set out every evening to provide entertainment to an eager public who gladly paid 10 piastres a head to watch the antics of Laurel and Hardy or Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times*, preceded by a short cartoon. Incredibly, profits poured in, and Zarpanelli began to search for an investment outlet. An old villa belonging to the Bakhum family went up for sale during that period. Zarpanelli thought the location was ideal for a cinema. He acquired the villa, tore it down, and established Cinema Radio on the site. Unlike the Raissi brothers, Zarpanelli was interested in actually making films, and in the promotion of actresses and dancers. When he was offered to produce *Raya wa Sekina*, he never hesitated. Although he hit on a winner that first time, his fortunes soon changed as he backed one clunker after the other. Broke, he sold Cinema Radio to the Ga'far brothers, who already owned cinemas Opera and Rivoli and who, like the Raissis, were the largest cinema owners in Egypt. Their empire, however, was longer-lived.

Regardless of the changing fortunes of individuals, the golden years of cinema were just starting in Egypt, especially in Cairo and Alexandria, where a cosmopolitan public seemed never to tire of foreign films. More cinemas were built in the capital and the provinces. At one point there were 400 cinemas throughout the country. The elite bought yearly subscriptions which provided brochures with lists of future films and had seats or boxes automatically reserved for each première. It became a tradition to meet in certain restaurants after the movies, to copy favourite stars' dresses and to peruse foreign and local specialised magazines for all that concerned the seventh art. Star-struck youngsters vowed to become actors or directors and the young public in general became more acquainted with films than with their schoolbooks.

Meanwhile, Egyptian cinema's star was rising. In 1925, banker Tal'at Harb established his own film company and cinema, utilising exclusively Egyptian personnel, among whom he selected a few for training in Europe.

The first Egyptian film was launched in 1926. In 1929, there were fifty cinemas in Cairo and the large provincial cities. In the early 1930s, talking films were developed. The first Egyptian musical, *Unshudat Al-Fuad*, was released in 1932, followed in 1933 by Abdel-Wahab's *Al-Warda Al-Bayda'*. In 1935, the Egyptian public was treated to Munira El-Mahdiya's *Ghandura*.

Artists like Badi'a Massabni then decided that they were interested in producing films and, after Abdel-Wahab's success with *Al-Warda Al-Bayda'*, Umm Kulthoum threw herself into the fray with *Widad*, the first of her six films. On this particular occasion, Umm Kulthoum wanted to star in an historical piece featuring Bedouin. She chose Fikri Abaza to write the script to a story that she invented herself. Abdel-Wahab was her co-star. Careful with her own money, Umm Kulthoum preferred not to finance her ventures into the world of cinema personally. In the case of *Widad*, Boulos Hanna Pasha offered to underwrite the costs. "Although production costs were generally high, if financing could be arranged, the profits and fees were much greater than those from any other source," writes Virginia Danielson in *The Voice of Egypt, Umm Kulthum, Arabic Song and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century* (The American University in Cairo Press, 1997).

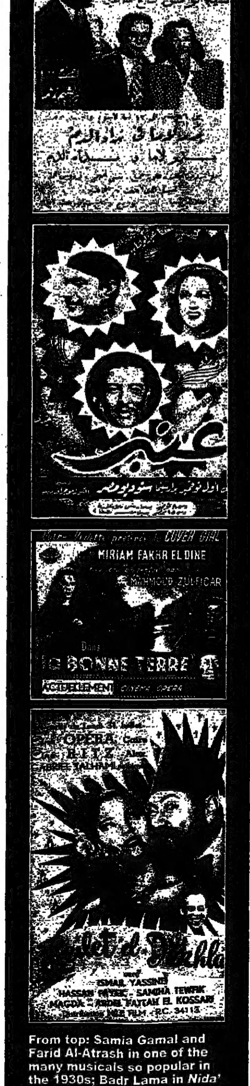
The prospect of high profits attracted a number of performers from other Arab countries who became connected with cinema in one way or the other. The Al-Atrash family, who rose to fame during that period, immediately comes to mind, but there were many others who, whether deliberately or by chance, were able to carve out prosperous careers for themselves in the field.

Marie Queenie had various professional successes as an actress, a studio owner, a technician and a producer. She came to Egypt from Lebanon with her mother and sisters in the dawn of cinema's golden age. Her aunt, Assia, was well on her way to becoming one of Egyptian cinema's most famous stars. In 1940, Marie Queenie, who had always had supporting roles in her aunt's films, married Ahmed Galal, Assia's director. In 1942, Galal acquired a plot of land in Hadayeq Al-Qubba, where he built his studio, mainly with construction material bought from the British army. The films in which Assia and Marie Queenie starred for the next five years were produced at Studio Galal.

Galal died in 1947 and, for a year, his widow was at a loss. Then she decided to pick up the pieces and proceed in the footsteps of her late husband. She acted occasionally but, more importantly, ran the studio and produced films. Director Hassan Imam translated French scripts, and Studio Galal began to prosper once more. Marie Queenie is proud to trace a few of Youssef Chahine's first films to her studio, in particular his first film with Omar El-Sherif.

From the start, Marie Queenie had been interested in film editing. She began, she says, by editing Assia's films. "It was all cutting and sticking then, all done by hand," but, since Studio Galal could not afford the new editing facilities at first, she sent the work to cinema Olympia for a time. There, the Raissis had established a state-of-the-art lab for that purpose. When the studio began to do well, she decided to buy the necessary equipment and, with the help of Marcelle Saleh, the studio began its own editing work. Finally Marie Queenie made the decision she considers the most daring of her career: In the '50s, she established a fully equipped laboratory for colour, "the most technically advanced in Egypt," she notes proudly. The future seemed bright, especially since her son, Nader, was becoming a film director in his own right. A fateful year, 1963, put paid to her dreams for the future, however: nationalisation forced her to relinquish ownership of the studio.

The film industry as a whole was changing. With the advent of television and a political climate adverse to frivolity, cinema-goers chose to watch films in the privacy of their homes. Many cinemas fell victim to neglect and were closed. Others attracted audiences which did not care about the quality of production. Today, a revival may be looming on the horizon, but, with the number of new films now accessible via satellite, cinema owners will be hard put to attract a new clientele not brought up on the tradition of a night at the cinema, which was such an important part of their parents' lives.



From top: Samia Gamal and Farid Al-Atrash in one of the many musicals so popular in the 1930s; Badr Lama in *Nida' Al-Damm* (Blood Calls); Laila Murad and Anwar Wagdi in *Anbar* (Amber); Mahmoud Zulficar's *Al-Ard Al-Tayyiba* (The Good Earth), with Mariam Fakhreddin and Kamal El-Shennawi; *Laylat Al-Dokhla* (Wedding Night), with Ismail Yassin and Hassan Fayeq

Sixteen frames to realism

Moving pictures caused a sensation when they were first revealed to the Egyptian public, writes **Hani Mustafa**. It was only a matter of time before cinema-goers could hear the actors too. Then the *fallahin* made their entrance

"European photographers are in the process of inventing a way of displaying photographic images as though they were moving." This short announcement appeared in *Al-Hilal* magazine in May 1895. Later that year, on 28 December, the Lumière brothers held the first ground-breaking public performance of the Cinématographe at the Indian Salon of the Grand Café, Boulevard des Capucines, Paris.

Events followed in rapid succession. Almost a year later, on 5 November 1896, the first motion picture performance was held in one of the reception halls of Tousson Pasha's palace in Alexandria. Shortly afterwards, on the 28th of that month, another screening was held at the Shepheard's Hotel. These occasions marked the beginning of a story told in 16 frames per second, a projection speed which portrayed action on film as faster than life. Sound in the cinema had yet to make its entrance. For the most part, the first attempts at cinematography were short, documentary films.

Initially, the cinema industry in Egypt was primarily associated with European expatriates in Cairo and Alexandria. It was not long, however, before the intriguing new invention and the potential it offered attracted Egyptian enthusiasts. Among the first Egyptians to make a name in the industry was a young revolutionary, Mohamed Bayoumi, who had graduated from military college in 1915. He was discharged from the military in 1918 due to his militant agitation against the British occupation. Following the 1919 Revolution, in which he took part, he traveled to Berlin to study cinema, returning in 1923 to found Egypt's first cinema studio — Amoun Films — in Shubra. In keeping with his political sympathies, the films he produced focused on nationalist issues. One of his works, perhaps the most famous documentary in the history of Egyptian cinema, recorded the return of the nationalist leader, Saad Zaghloul, from exile in 1923. In the same year, Bayoumi produced another pioneering work, *Barsoum Looks for a Job*, the first narrative film in the history of the Egyptian cinema.



Aziza Amir

The 1920s saw the formation of the cinema clubs from which the founders of Egypt's first large cinema production firms would emerge. The Cinema Club for Amateurs, advocated by the *Suwar Al-Mutaharrika* (Moving Pictures) magazine, was formed in 1923, followed, in 1926, by the Mina Film club in Alexandria. The latter was short-lived as its founders, Ibrahim and Badr Lama, soon founded the Kandour Cinema Company and turned to actual film production.

The Isis Film Company, founded by Aziza Amir, was another of Egypt's first large cinema production firms. One of its first films was *Yad Allah* (The Hand of God), a large part of which was filmed by the Turkish writer Widad Orfi. The film was harshly criticised for having misrepresented Egyptian society. Friction between the Turkish writer/photographer and Aziza Amir, generated by the film's failure, became increasingly acrimonious during their collaboration in Isis Films' next two projects.

November appears to be the month for firsts in the cinema industry. On 16 November 1928, Cinema Metropole screened the first full-length Egyptian feature film, *Layla*, starring Aziza Amir and Widad Orfi and directed by Estefan Rosti. Highly melodramatic, in keeping with the spirit of the times, the film portrayed the tragedy of a country girl whose lover had absconded after making her pregnant. The village scandal forced the girl to flee to Cairo, where she met with various other trials and tribulations. *Layla* was the first film to use large numbers of *fallahin* as extras; their training required extensive time and effort on the part of the director.

Meanwhile, the Lama brothers, the Isis Company's major competitors, also began to produce full-length feature films. Indeed, their film *Qubla fi'l-Sahra'* (Kiss in the Desert), starring Badr Lama and Ibrahim Zulfiqar and directed by Ibrahim Lama, was screened several months before *Layla*. Historians, however, consider *Layla* the first full-length Egyptian feature film, because it had begun filming before *Qubla*.

Another major firm to influence the Egyptian cinema industry was the Egyptian Acting and Cinema Company, founded by the famous economist and financier, Tal'at Harb, in 1925. The company bought Mohamed Bayoumi's studio and appointed Bayoumi a member of its technical department. It was not until 1935, when Tal'at Harb built an enormous cinema studio complex, that the firm branched out from shorts and documentaries to full-length feature films. Its hallmark film was *Widad*, starring Umm Kulthoum.

Another important transition in the history of cinema worldwide occurred with the introduction of sound in 1929. This period also saw the increase of the speed of projection from 16 to 24 frames per second. The Egyptian film industry did not introduce sound until 1932, the only exception being *Taht Daw' Al-Qamar* (In the Light of the Moon) directed by Shukri Madi in 1929 which was accompanied by sound played on records. *Unshudat Al-Fouad* (The Heart's Hymn), screened on 14 April 1932, therefore, introduced Egyptian cinema into the "sound era". However, there appears to be some controversy here, for *Awlad Al-Zawat* (Rich Kids), screened in Cinema Royal on 14 March of that year, also featured a fully integrated sound track. Again, as with *Layla* and *Qubla*, the fact that filming had begun on *Unshudat Al-Fouad* first settled the score.

Gradually, as cinematographers perfected the new camera and sound technology, high melodrama began to yield to realism. Thus, another landmark film in the Egyptian cinema was *Al-Azima* (Determination), directed by Kamal Salim in 1939. The film, which dealt with the issue of economic hardship and unemployment, was set against the background of an Egyptian alleyway, adding to the element of realism. Evidently, the actors and technicians who had worked on the film had treated the director with a mixture of sarcasm and pity. They were certain that he was spending an inordinate amount of effort on a project that was sure to be a fiasco. Contrary to their expectations, however, *Al-Azima* was an unrivaled box-office success. It was the first time that the Egyptian film-going public felt that the events they were watching on the screen were part of their concrete day-to-day lives.

Naturally, one would expect the cinema, as is the case with all forms of art, to undergo perpetual change and development. Kamal Salim, with *Al-Azima*, founded a new and vibrant school of Egyptian cinema, among the prime exponents of which was the proliferate Salah Abu Seif.

However, Egyptian cinema appears to have made few advances. It is true that we have seen significant new departures in the works of such established figures as Kamal El-Sheikh and Youssef Chahine, as well as in the works of directors of the "middle generation" such as Ra'fat El-Mihi, Khairi Bishara and Daoud Abdel-Sayed, however, these are exceptions. Even the new generation of directors, such as Magdi Ahmed Ali, Radwan El-Kashef and Osama Fawzi — although the latter has produced films imbued with poetic lyricism — remain largely ensconced in the realist school.

Edited by **Pascale Ghazaleh**

Cook's ambassadors on tour

Last week, 250 British tour operators from Thomas Cook Holidays travelled around the country to learn about its past, its present — and its future. Their mission: to sell the Egyptian tourist product in the UK. **Rehab Saad** tagged along



Giza's Pyramids were on the itinerary for today's delegates... *photo: Mohamed Wassim*

Egypt, land of pharaohs
Valley of the kings
Temples, pyramids and beautiful things
It would bring to my face such a big smile
To be cruising along the river Nile

These are the words of Debbie Harris, when she was asked why she wanted to be one of Thomas Cook's "Ambassadors for Egypt". This nine-day educational programme was designed to restore confidence in Egypt as a tourist destination after the massacre in Luxor. The participants are 250 staff members from Thomas Cook offices throughout the United Kingdom. Their mission: to see what Egypt can offer as far as tourist facilities and security are concerned.

Each participant is being challenged to sell Egypt to two clients for four nights per month — in other words, to bring 4,000 tourists to Egypt between them over the coming year. If they meet this target, the reward will be a reunion in Aswan in December 1998 featuring a cruise on Lake Nasser aboard the SS Prince Abbas.

The 250 delegates did not travel simultaneously, but were divided into six groups, each of which then headed for a different destination for a period of five days. Their programme was a mixture of hotel site inspections and sightseeing.

Afterwards, the participants reassembled in Cairo for a gala weekend at the Semiramis Intercontinental where they had a number of workshops and training sessions. Each of the six groups summarised what they had learnt for the others and suggested how they could promote different destinations.

"Each now has a mission on their return to England. They have to prepare a business plan for how they intend to bring people in. Some have put forward creative ideas, like going into colleges, or women's institutes, to promote Egypt; others will host a group in a hotel and screen a video about Egypt. Everyone will be busy doing something different," said Simon Laxton, general manager of Thomas Cook Holidays.

"We intend to encourage agents to sell as many holidays as they can," stressed Sarah Leveritt, Egypt product manager of the company. "We will suggest that there should be a special day for Egypt in all our offices. On that occasion, an Egyptian night will be held: people will be dressed in traditional Egyptian costume and Egyptian food will be served." There will also be a video, shot last December, showing Egypt's historical and tourist treasures.

"I visited Luxor with the group for the first time in my life and I was really impressed with the monuments, bazaars, Sound and Light performances and *hantours* [horse-drawn carriages]," said Katy Pearson, one of the tour operators. Pearson says she will tell everyone back home how safe Egypt is and how well she was looked after.

"Most of the people in my group had travelled to Egypt many times before," said Mohamed Shatta, tour guide of the Aswan group. "This time they were more conscious of change than ever before: that roads had improved and cruise boats are in better condition. These are the people who have to sell Egypt. If they are convinced by what they have seen, they will convince their clients. Word of mouth is the best means of promotion," he said. Shatta described his group's trip as the most successful he had ever made. "We went to Aswan, cycled through the villages and travelled from place to place in *hantours*. People welcomed us everywhere," he said. He added that the many young girls in his group had gone shopping late at night and "none reported any inconvenience".

"We are marketing Egypt in five categories: Cairo and the Pyramids, Luxor, Nile cruises, Abu Simbel and Lake Nasser as well as the Red Sea resorts and Sinai," said Laxton. "That is why we chose these areas for our inspection tour. We want our staff to have first-hand knowledge of what Egypt is offering, we want to reassure our clients on the question of safety, and we are working to get business for the coming summer and winter seasons."

In addition to the "Ambassadors of Egypt" programme, the Ministry of Tourism has launched a series of TV advertisements at a cost of 30 million sterling which will be screened from May to September. The ads feature everything from antiquities to diving and safari trips, as well as night-time entertainment.

Leveritt said that a new brochure for Egypt will be launched in April, outlining new programmes, including a tour of classic [historic] hotels and a tour combining a week's cruising with a trip to the sources of the Nile in Uganda.

Perhaps the most important section in the brochure is that dedicated to the new millennium. "People in England are expecting a big celebration in Egypt, and we have already had a lot of requests. I believe that this will be a good opportunity for Egypt to rebuild the confidence of its clients," Leveritt said.

Certain demands were also made by the British tour operators. "We, the English, like to do the long cruise," said Laxton. "My request would be for the government to give us permits to do the full cruise from Cairo to Aswan. I believe that other nationalities like the Germans and the French would support this suggestion."

"If a programme that combines the long cruise with a trip to the source of the Nile is put into effect, I can guarantee the number of guests will be tripled," said Nagui Erian, general manager of the Prince Abbas cruiser which is run by Thomas Cook.

Stanley Cargill, a tour operator who has been working in the field for 24 years, stressed the importance of more frequent domestic flights. "There should be regular flights from Hurghada to Luxor, and from Sharm El-Sheikh to Luxor," he said.

Laxton admits that Egypt is his company's favourite destination. "For us there is no substitute destination for Egypt. If you do not come this year, you will come the year after. As a matter of fact, a lot of people who cancelled after the Luxor attack are now re-booking," he revealed.

Site tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Turbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410.

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE346 for Egyptians, LE1145 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE254 for Egyptians, LE831 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE899 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE947 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**

Collector's journal reveals all

Very little was known about the excavations of Count Michal Tyszkiewicz, one of the greatest and best-known collectors of classical antiquities, until his original journal was discovered in 1972. **Jill Kamil** attended a lecture marking the centennial of his death




... but the monuments at Girgeh, seen by the count in his travels, have completely disappeared from erosion and pillage

"His travels in Egypt in the mid-19th century (1861-1862) were noteworthy for the breadth of his interests, his personal experiences, and the fact that although he described himself as a man with an 'antiquarian bent', he was no collector: this allowed his treasures to be dispersed to the museums of the world," said Professor Andrzej Niwinski of the University of Warsaw in a lecture at the Polish Institute in Cairo.

"Tyszkiewicz collected over 800 objects from Egypt and on his return to Paris unpacked them, classified them, enjoyed them for a short while, and then offered them to the Louvre. They were not sold," Niwinski stressed, "the famous healing statue, jewels, scarabs, *schwepte* figures, Horus eyes in gold and carnelian, all were simply given away. Once he had collected and studied them, he lost interest in them completely."

A rich man of a Lithuanian-Polish family, Tyszkiewicz was a Russian citizen. Hunting was one of his passions and he brought with him to Egypt various kinds of rifles and even several dogs — retrievers. In those days, Egypt was a paradise for hunters, especially on Lake Manzala where birds were so plentiful that when they took to the air they cast a great dark cloud on the water. In his journal, Tyszkiewicz describes his meeting with Lord Londesborough "who came equipped with a special kind of cannon capable of killing several dozen geese with one shot," he wrote. A whole section in his journal covers his bird and crocodile-hunting experiences.

Travellers were not pressed for time in those days. Although Tyszkiewicz's goal was Upper Egypt and Nubia, he also explored the Delta. He travelled from Alexandria along the Mahmoudiya Canal to Rosetta and Damietta, taking his time to attend what he called "fantasia", describing beautiful girls dancing and singing bawdy songs, and observing the lives of the villagers.

In Cairo, he visited Islamic monuments, absorbed the colourful atmosphere of the city, travelled along a wide tree-lined thoroughfare that then extended to Shoubra Palace, and described cafeterias and archaeological sites with equal enthusiasm. He gave details of the time it took to visit the Tree of the Virgin and the obelisk in "Abbas", which was probably Abbassiya, and he was guided round the antiquities museum in Bulaq by the great Egyptologist Gaston Maspero himself.

The count also met Ferdinand de Lesseps of Suez Canal fame, Mohamed Said Pacha, whom he described as "of rather short stature and corpulent, with a large and red beard divided into two forms, golden-like rays," and everywhere he went he was treated with great respect.

"More than that. He was courted by members of Egypt's ruling family and," suggested Niwinski, "that was perhaps not so surprising because he was a rich aristocrat, heir to a big family estate in Lithuania, and financial support in certain quarters may have been the price he paid for freedom to do what he wanted in Egypt."

Interestingly, although Tyszkiewicz wrote in his journal that Said Pacha helped archaeologists and was willing to give him a *firman*, (an open letter of reference addressed to state officials which could be helpful during further travels and excavations), "this science doesn't amuse me." The facts speak otherwise. He described unwrapping mummies in the museum with enthusiasm, and he even attempted to learn hieroglyphics.

Tyszkiewicz criticised illicit excavations and the desecration of monuments, including the "barbarous" hacking out of reliefs by Europeans. "It is a pity," he wrote, "that the Egyptian government does not pay enough attention." Yet, he himself was not above illicit digging. He was apparently allowed to excavate on the east bank of the Nile in Luxor, but refused permission to do so on the necropolis, which was "absolutely and entirely reserved for Mariette". Nevertheless, he described his own night robbings:

He was apparently taken to the necropolis by an Arab who had "made an arrangement with some guardians of the excavations at Thebes, and they promised not to watch in the night in a valley behind the mountain of Assasif. Thus, we'll be able to make nightly researches during some hours in that valley... we should go on our first secret expedition tomorrow night. My conscience murmurs something, but the antiquarian bent prevails, and I am just beginning to dream about mummies and coffins," he wrote.

"It was remarkable that the count was able to acquire such a large number of objects from Egypt so soon after Mariette, then in charge of the *Service des Antiquities*, had tabled a law (in 1850) controlling the activities of foreigners," Niwinski commented. "Theoretically no objects could be exported. It was against the law. Yet the objects which came into the possession of the Warsaw National Museum in 1919 number about 260, including mortuary texts on papyri, and funerary objects."

When Count Tyszkiewicz started excavating at Karnak he chose an area that probably, suggested Niwinski, "lay between the temples of Amun and Mut to the east. There he found scarabs, statuettes of gods in bronze and stone, pottery, and a table of offerings.

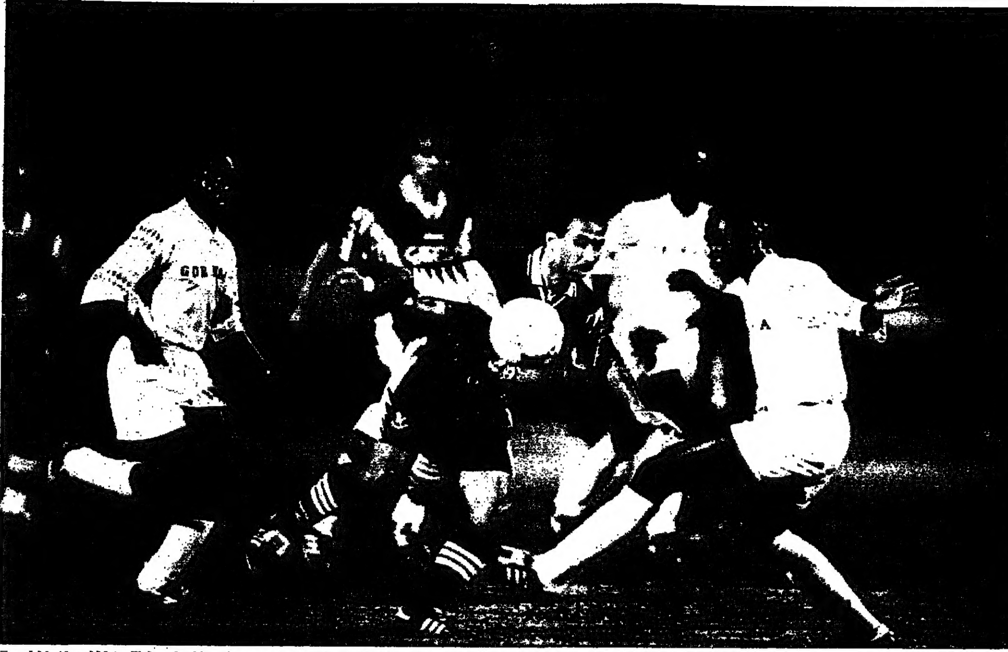
Conditions were not always favourable. He wrote in his journal on 16 December: "...the *khamsin* is still blowing and it makes the digging works difficult. Our eyes are already reddened from the annoying cloud of dust. I am obliged to wash myself of the black dust several times a day, however I don't give up the works, and again collect today considerable fruits..."

And considerable fruits they were indeed. Eight hundred objects in the year in which he travelled extensively, part of the river journey in the *dahabiyyah* cruise boat in which Lucy Duff Gordon had sailed, passing the First Cataract to Philae and Wadi Sebua on the journey southward, and Amada, Dakka, Debod and other sites on the return journey.

He had a chance meeting with slave traders, and, according to Niwinski, was offered a sample of their wares but refused. "He also innocently shared a pipe with a friendly minister at a time when the plague was rampant..."

The count's last record refers to excavations at Saqqara: "On the desert I dug out quite a number of beautiful bronzes: I must give them to the Louvre." And here, indeed, is the character of the man in a single sentence.

The important thing to him was the experience, not the possession. He gave away his treasures. His notes indicate that he made an Atlas but it was never found.



Zamalek's Ahmed Metwalli throwing himself on the ball while Gor Mahia players are helpless

photos: Mohamed Wassim

Zamalek saves the day

Zamalek restored some pride to Egyptian football with a 4-0 triumph over Kenyan visitors Gor Mahia. Meanwhile, in two other African club games, a gamble by Ahli backfired and Ismaili were humbled by a newcomer. **Abeer Anwar** reports on the ups and downs

Zamalek did what other Egyptian clubs could not do this week: beat an African team. The former African champions romped over Gor Mahia of Kenya 4-0 to go through to the second round of the African Football Confederation (CAF) Cup.

The first-leg in Nairobi had ended 1-0 for Gor Mahia. In the return match, Zamalek's first goal was headed in by defender Medhat Abdel-Hadi in the 38th minute. In the second half, newly-discovered star Mohamed Bassiouni scored on the break in the 61st minute. Malian midfielder Ismail Coulibaly then struck twice for Zamalek to seal the victory.

While Zamalek was showing how it was done, two other Egyptian clubs suffered shock defeats. Ahli was eliminated from the first round of the African Champions League, drawing with Ethiopia's Coffee 2-2. Ahli, whose stars helped Egypt win the African Nations Cup two months ago, had forced a 1-1 draw in Addis Ababa, a result that seemed to clear a path into the second round.

Ahli, playing in the African club competition again after a three-year break, were expected to romp home in the return leg. So confident were they, in fact, that they left the task to a mainly reserve side while the first team regulars went to Tunisia to play in the Arab Super Cup.

A goal in the 10th minute seemed to vindicate Ahli's decision but the unheralded Ethiopians sprang their surprise at the end. Ahli's elimination took place in a devastating six-minute spell. Coffee came from behind twice, with the second equaliser arriving 60 seconds before the end of normal time in front of 15,000 stunned home supporters, who could not believe their star-studded team had crashed out of the $3 million championship.

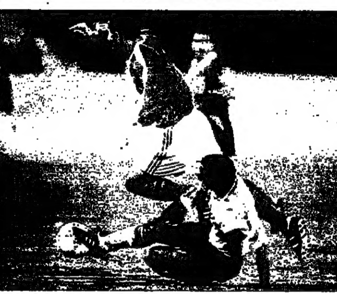
After the match, Ahli coach Ahmed Maher said it was the best that his inexperienced juniors players could do. "I don't blame them. Going out of the preliminaries is just like going out of the semi-finals," Maher said.

In Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, the novice Red Sea team, cheered on by a crowd of 30,000 waving red and white flags, held on for a goalless draw against much-vaunted Ismaili to win on away goals and advance to the second round of the African Cup Winners Cup.

The Eritreans had forced an improbable 2-2 draw in Egypt last month in the first leg and defended stoutly in the return game, which saw a goal disallowed by both teams. The victory set off mass celebrations throughout the town.

Red Sea, the first Eritrean club to enter the cup, had to pre-qualify, and were considered nothing more than cannon fodder for an Egyptian side boasting Nations Cup star Ahmed Hassan. But the first-leg stalemate heightened hopes of a fairy-tale triumph for Red Sea.

Ali Abu-Greisha, Ismaili's technical manager, said the team was in a tough situation after having suddenly lost the services of its Argentine coach. "We have to reorganise before we can start winning again," Abu-Greisha said.



Ahli's Koushari snatching the ball to score the second goal for his team

Karate

THE EGYPTIAN Junior Karate team was able to collect 19 medals, 10 of them gold, in the African Championship in Cameroon. Their final tally was 10 gold, five silver and four bronze.

Table Tennis

AHLI retained the national league table tennis title for the tenth year, after beating Zamalek men 3-0 and their women 3-1. In the men's event, Ahli's Ashraf Sobhi, Amr Reda and Sherif El-Saket were pitted against Zamalek's Ahmed Saleh, Mohamed El-Guindy and Ayman Helmi. In the women's event, Ahli was represented by Shaimaa Abdel-Aziz and Shereen El-Alfi, and Zamalek by Zeinab El-Mahgoub and Fatema Abou-Gabal.

Track

THREE-time world cross-country champion Lynn Jennings, who was expected to be top American Woman in the Boston Marathon, has withdrawn from the 20 April race. Jennings, a bronze medalist in the 10,000 metres at the 1992 Olympics, had planned to make her official marathon debut in Boston. "Because my preparation for the Boston Marathon has not gone as well as I had planned, I am regretfully withdrawing from the race," said Jennings. In 1978, she posted the third-best woman's time in the Boston Marathon, 2 hours 46 minutes. Because she was one year under the minimum age requirement of 18, her time was not included in the official results. Jennings, now 37, currently holds American records for two indoor races — 3,000 metres and 5,000 metres — and three outdoor races — 10,000 metres, eight kilometres and 10 kilometres.

Chess

FIDF World Chess champion Anatoly Karpov has scheduled eight speed games against Hungary's Judit Polgar, the world's top-rated woman player. The games will take place from 9 to 12 June in Budapest, the Hungarian News Agency MTI reported. Karpov is the reigning champion of the world chess federation, known by its French acronym FIDF. "Judit is an excellent player and I'm sure the match will be followed with great interest throughout the world," Karpov said.

Olympics

NEW SOUTH Wales' State opposition leader has criticised the government-appointed president of the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games. Peter Collins said almost 70 per cent of jobs filled at SOCOG over the past year were not advertised. Michael Knight, the Olympics minister, who is also SOCOG president, and the ruling Labour Party were using SOCOG as a milking cow for their friends, Collins said.

You win one, you lose one

Ahli made up somewhat for their African debacle by winning the Arab Super Cup in Tunisia

Ahli, the defending champions, retained the Arab Super Cup for the second consecutive year, playing to a goalless draw with hosts Club Africain, then winning two games with identical 2-0 scores against Saudi Arabia's Shebab and Algeria's Mouloudia. Shebab's 2-2 draw with Club Africain in the final match gave Ahli the title.

The four clubs made up a single group. Ahli collected seven points from the five-day event to come out on top. Second place went to Club Africain, who finished with five points from one victory and two draws. Shebab was third with four points and Mouloudia finished last with no points at all.

Ahli had split its team in two in order to play in the African League Championship, which was being held at the same time. The team's top players were sent to Tunisia, whereas its juniors, propped up by three veteran players, took on Ethiopia's Coffee in Cairo.

It was a risky decision. On Friday, as half of Ahli was winning the Super Cup in Tunisia, the other half drew 2-2 with Coffee in a second-leg match. The first match in Ethiopia had ended 1-1 which meant Ahli was eliminated from the 32nd round of the continent's premier club competition, the first time this has happened to the four-time African champions.

However, Hassan Hamdi, Ahli's vice president, said the club did not regret playing in two championships at the same time.

Why should they? The Arab title, after all, brought them $50,000 in prize money.

A weak week

The 20th week of the domestic football league ended with a feeling of dejà vu: predictable losses, foreseeable victories. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** gives it a 'ho' and a 'hum'

Arab Contractors defeated Ittihad Othman's Dina 1-0 to hold on to third place with 37 points, one point behind Zamalek. Dina, on the other hand, are still on 21 points following a match whose highlights were a yellow card for Dina's Amr Abdou and the expelling of Dina's coach for dissent.

Dina are simply hoping to stay up, whereas Arab Contractors are chasing the front-runners Ahli, and maybe dream of capturing the league trophy. Their lone goal was scored by Khaled Kamel in the 79th minute.

In a more inspired game with a more surprising result, Masri lost 2-1 to Suez in Port Said. Khaled El-Kurdi scored the winner for Suez late in the game, which was drawn at half-time after goals from Tamer Bagato of Suez and Mowafak El-Basha of Masri. With this win, Suez notched up three precious points, jumping to 28 points in all, one point behind Masri.

For Masri, this was the latest in a string of poor performances which started soon after they won the Egypt Cup last month. It also ended their brief honeymoon with their fans, who this week reverted to cheering the Suez players after the game. Masri players were fined by the club for losing, while Suez players each received a LE1,000 bonus.

In a balanced affair, Ghazl El-Mehalla and Mansoura drew 1-1. With 13 games to go, Ghazl have 30 points and Mansoura 27. Abdel-Latif El-Domani of Ghazl scored in the eighth minute and Walid Salah equalised with only three minutes to go.

Following their unprecedented 2-0 victory over league leaders Ahli in Cairo last week, Aswan returned to their losing ways, going down 2-0 to Ghazl El-Suez. Both goals came in the first half, from Ahmed Abdullah and Sayed Tigana. In the second half, Aswan played with 10 men after Mohamed Adel Mursi was sent off. Ghazl El-Suez now have 24 points while relegation-threatened Aswan are stuck on 19. The winners were given *eidia*, to celebrate the coming feast.

Shams, another team struggling to stay afloat, edged ahead of Baladiat El-Mehalla, winning 1-0, as Mustafa Kamel scored in the 11th minute. Shams' 20 points give it two more than Baladiat El-Mehalla at the bottom of the table. Both teams, however, are still battling to stay alive.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

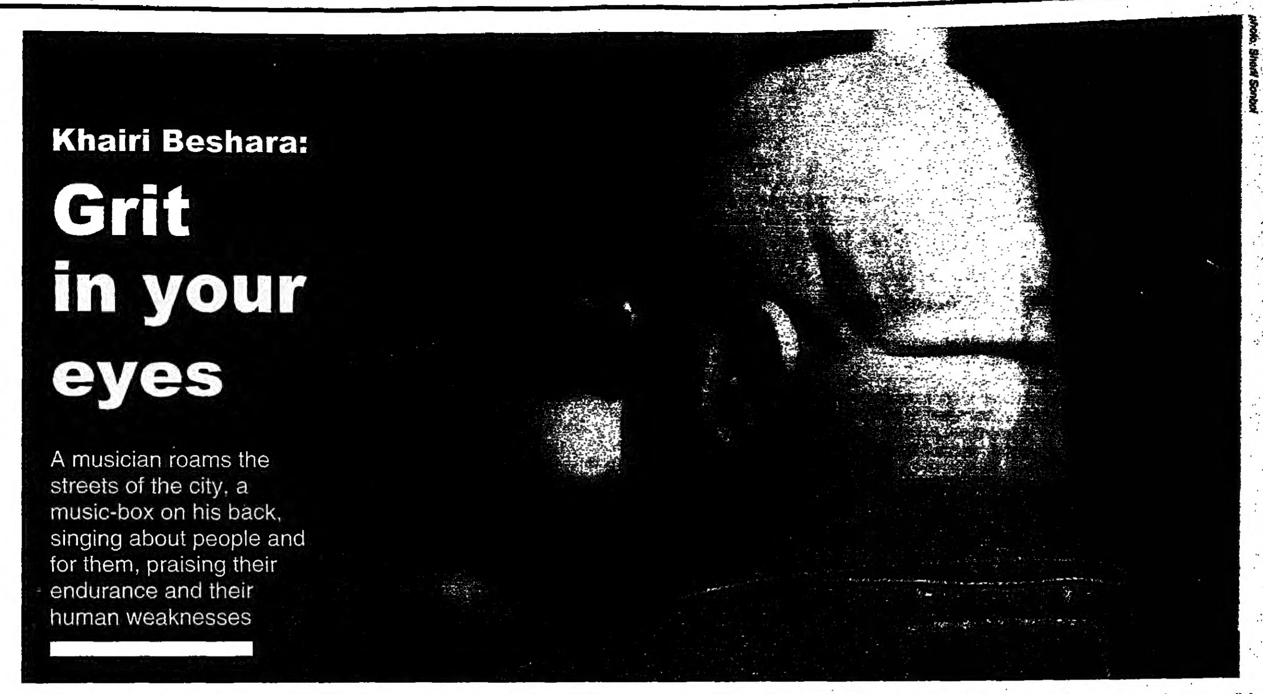


Photo: Sherif Sonbol

Khairi Beshara:

Grit in your eyes

A musician roams the streets of the city, a music-box on his back, singing about people and for them, praising their endurance and their human weaknesses

Khairi Beshara and his level-headed camera capture and expose reality. Whether a documentary or a feature film, a Beshara picture is everyday life without embellishments or deliberate distortion.

This bald, bold, stocky man, now in his mid-'50s, sits up straight on a wooden chair, across a table, and begins to recollect his beginnings. Full of nostalgia and admiration, he looks back on the early '70s as a brief golden age for Egyptian documentary films. "This age dawned with *Hossan Al-Tin* (Clay Horse) and *Al-Nil Arzaq* (On the Nile) by Attiyat El-Abnoudi and Hashim El-Nahass," says Beshara. Both documentaries were contemporaneous with the national sense of despair which followed the 1967 defeat. The traditional form, with voice-over commentary, was no longer in use: social awareness had charged this visual medium.

Beshara made several contributions to this golden age, which ended in 1977. He reaches out absent-mindedly to pluck a manuscript from a nearby bookshelf, immersed in the recollection of that depressing period, the sunset of "the beautiful years". The manuscript is his book, *Cinema and Reality*, which he has never published. He reads a section about one of his own films: "Although Abdel-Aati's fame spread, *Sa'id Al-Dabbabat* (Tank Hunter) was nothing but a film about ordinary human beings, speculation and a voyage through the true, simple, banal sides of his personality and his social background. Shibaa Al-Qiss, Sharqiya, was a village that awoke all my childhood memories, brought back all I had read and my somber yearnings in connection with the Egyptian village. Here, in just such a village, the camera should be planted, to inhale the aroma of the soil and the peasants, to harvest the films of our dreams, hopes and aspirations."

It is now easier to understand how Beshara remains convinced that there was never a defined boundary between feature and documentary. This conviction accompanies him in his film-making, which is why Samir Farid considered *Awwama Saba'in* (House Boat No. 70) Egypt's first new-realism film, and compared it to *Al-Suq Al-Sawdaa* (Black Market), the first realist work in Egyptian film history, dating back to the late '30s.

His emotions, concerns and motivations — how to know and comprehend, that was the question — marked the beginnings of Beshara's presentation of reality, and the way he relates to it, as a human being, through film. Because he grew up in a village, and remains romantically attached to rural life, he needed to break emotional barriers to the cruelty of reality. His almost naturalist concentration on the village, coupled with an ambitious attempt to renew cinematic language, was aimed at this end. Documentaries allowed him to do without the conventional techniques of narration and story-telling prevalent in mainstream productions.

His voyage to Poland — a fellowship — was his first break from his family, independence and a new experience: of life, more than of cinema. "My personality has rebellion at its core; it was not born, as some like to believe, with *Kaboria* (Crabs)." The nouvelle vague, neo-Czech cinema, Tarkovsky and Macaviev: Beshara admires them, and believes he was born in the '60s, as far as culture is concerned.

His documentary work was characterised by his respect for the form. Its charms include the absence of actors, decorations, make-up, and even private sponsors. The government funded him. "I enjoyed the maximum liberty any filmmaker could have had. The government, however, tended to associate the documentaries of the '70s with communism, and finally the attempt to bury this epoch alive succeeded. Back then we never defended ourselves. We deeply respected freedom of thought, and the charges made against us were unfounded, since we did not consider 'communist' an accusation." They shared a hybrid of liberalist and socialist beliefs, he and his friends; but he was never an active member of a communist party. "This sterile way of thinking failed to realise that Western, capitalist, liberal cinemas produced many films containing a similar dosage of social criticism and were never dubbed 'communist' — at least after Macarthy."

His documentaries: *Tank Hunter, Village Doctor, The Seagull, Illumination* and *Rock Talks*. All these were entries in the Leipzig International Film Festival and the Cairo National Film Festival. Among the awards he collected: Best Idea, for the first; Best Film, Direction and Screenplay, for the second and third; Best Direction, for the fourth. The Egyptian Association of Cinema Critics also awarded him the award for best documentary three times, for *Village Doctor, The Seagull* and *Rock Talks*, concurrently with Dawoud Abdel-Sayed's documentaries. *Village Doctor* also won first place at the Nineteenth International Student Union Festival at Leipzig, as well as Best Documentary from the Catholic Audiovisual Cultural Centre, and, most remarkably, the State Incentive Award of the First Degree from the Higher Council of Arts and Literature in 1978.

All of Beshara's documentaries can be seen as preparation for a feature film. His documentaries were always experiments, attempts to reconstruct reality. He shot ordinary people, trying to play real-life roles; they were seen and captured unawares.

"From this documentary epoch, our feature films were born. [Mohamed] Khan and I are twins. Each of us brought out a deeply hidden side in the other — the most important and only side that needed to emerge." Beshara acted in several of Khan's feature films, while Khan acted in *House Boat No.70*.

After 1980, Beshara's documentaries were no longer the bearers of his ambitions. He was ready for feature. The script of *Bloody Destinies* was presented to him, so he worked on it to develop it in his own direction. "Each of us — directors of this kind — creates his own special world, in which there are necessarily things that fascinate and interest him, and from which he excludes things that don't. I am interested in the south. I like the Nubians, their culture, their dialect and the Upper Egyptian dialect in general. I also like the sound of the Syrian dialect, and Italian songs and operas. In all my features, there are Italian songs. I admire slim men and women, and eyes that sparkle. I love spontaneous, simple, ordinary people."

He ridicules snobbism and feigned sophistication, but he certainly believes in human compassion. Sometimes this is misunderstood: an influential critic disliked *Ice Cream in Glym* because a businessman kisses a Nasserist, "although," Beshara explains, "to kiss then resume fighting is characteristic of Egyptians. At feasts and on national occasions we unite and celebrate, but soon dwell again on differences and old conflicts. Just because I did not show the obvious does not mean I consider what [the critic] saw as a reconciliation between the classes to be final. It is merely a more mature view of life: reconciliation follows dissension and disagreement, and vice-versa."

Al-Tawq wal-Eswera (The Collar and the Bracelet) was hailed nationally and internationally as one of the best four films in the history of Egyptian cinema. The film tackles barbed-wire themes like tradition and honour which, although they are not new subject matter, were dealt with in a completely different way: Beshara's stark vision and sobriety haunt those who have seen it. The setting — an Upper Egyptian village early in the century — as well as the costumes, acting style and dialect all contributed to the creation of a cruel, subtle world of despair and inevitability. In one of the Cannes festival journals, the year the film was shown, it was described as heralding the return of the golden age of Egyptian cinema, the 1950s and '60s.

Beshara's follow-up was *Yom Morr Yom Helw* (Sweet Day, Bitter Day), with Faten Hamama in the lead role. The film was shot in Shubra, the neighbourhood where the director had spent most of his life. This time his lyricism was transplanted into the heart of the crowded city.

Two years ago, Beshara won the Cairo Film Festival's Silver Pyramid award for *Isharit Murour* (Traffic Light), his most recent film. The film was attacked violently by critics and the press. The jury included Shabana Azmi from India, British actress Sarah Miles, filmmakers from Italy, China and Russia, as well as an American critic. They reached a consensus on *Isharit Murour*, the last film they saw. The critics and press influenced the public, however, and the film met with a hostile reception, a reaction Beshara considers very dangerous, regardless of the fact that he was directly implicated: "Dangerous, because it prevents the general public from seeing the real value of things and their natural proportions."

Critics label his recent films 'new style', and attack them. They are used to placing him in a certain category, and their reliance on the expected caused his films to shock them. "Any change in my approach is not intended to shock; I make what I like and I presume the audience will comprehend the film and place it in an adequate framework, without succumbing to a shock to which they have made themselves vulnerable. The audience were more understanding of the difference between my earlier and my more recent films. The latter were not commercial but experimental, and this is what the critics could not comprehend."

After the first private screening of *Kaboria*, Beshara recollects, there was silence in the theatre. Distributors, producers and critics attacked the experimental tendency of the film, but when it was released, achieving instant box-office success, they attacked its commercial appeal. "They always try to label you and criticise you, but I can make any kind of film that appeals to me. Criticism should concentrate more on the work itself, less on what's outside it. They do the reverse."

In every film, besides doing what he likes, Beshara tries to stir things up, to start a discussion. "With every film," he explains, "your account decreases. A creative person is anxious and refuses to declare bankruptcy to himself before he does so to others, and to the world. So he continuously feeds this account." Creativity must be replenished, Beshara says, through investment in cinema — investing emotions and thoughts, not money: "The latter is much easier."

And so it goes. "I can't succumb and be pigeonholed. I can't surrender to a certain wave or movement." Beshara refuses to lose, because "to lose doesn't mean to die. We used to juggle to get financing for our early films, all the way until the film-making crisis." Now he feels he is starting from scratch. He will shoot the film he wants tomorrow, if he wants to. It is the prospect that preoccupies him. He does not seek sponsorship and financing: "That would be lame." Even in the current crisis, Beshara insists nothing is impossible. Carried away, he cries: "I always have the optimism and the knowledge that, if I have the enthusiasm, with violence, I'll do all I can. Now I confront the crisis by dieting: I have lost eight kilograms by walking and going to the sauna once a week. I have a pill to calm me down in my pocket, for emergencies. Fatherhood is also my concern at this point. I befriend my son. He is talented, and has a good voice and a musical ear. And he is serious."

The right film director, Beshara proceeds more calmly, does not repeat the same experiment twice. In the beginning, one goes step by step, gradually, until a name and a personality have been established. "I used to suffer for four years to make a film because there was no money. If I had the capability and things to say, I'd make a film every six months."

Before *Kaboria*, Beshara was classified as a "prestige director", who "makes films that succeed at international film festivals, and that critics love, but that fail at the box-office". No one understood their generation correctly: "It was never deep, tender understanding."

They dreamt of making blockbusters which were still theirs alone. Awards were beside the point. They wanted people to see their films: "film as illumination, enlightenment". They wanted to reach the masses with their work, which had nothing to do with the commercial films at the cinema. They wanted their films to penetrate the world — "not to be international in a silly sense". It is his right, Beshara believes, to enjoy Kurasawa and Visconti, and it is also his right that Japanese and Italian audiences should enjoy his films. "They have to know about my culture and learn how to enjoy it; to know my views, laugh at my sense of humour and feel my depression. Communication was the primary aim, and if I also won recognition and awards, well, who hates the word 'bravo'? We were accused of portraying ugly things, our genre was called 'black realism', but this is only because we didn't comply with the prostitution of film and the use of plastic surgery to synthesise our pictures."

Beshara always refers to, and shows deep respect for, his predecessors, whose films became Egyptian classics; nonetheless, he maintains that his way is quite different and, to a great extent, opposed to theirs — "they popularised the industry at the expense of originality and authenticity, and paid little attention to refining and developing the cinematic language."

Then again, *Harb Al-Farawla* (Strawberry War) opens with a dedication to recent graduates of the Egyptian Film Institute, each one named. They, too, carry the banners he bore, calling for a new revolution in Egyptian cinema.

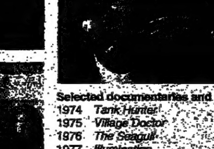
Profile by **Mohamed El-Assiouty**











Clockwise from above: *The Collar and the Bracelet*; receiving the Golden Pyramid at the Cairo Film Festival; *Nutshells*; *House Boat No. 70*

Filmography

Selected documentaries and short films:

1974	*Tank Hunter*
1975	*Village Doctor*
1976	*The Seagull*
1977	*Illumination*
1978	*Rock Talks*
1980	*Surpassing Despair*

Feature films:

1982	*Bloody Destinies*
1982	*House Boat No. 70*
1986	*The Collar and the Bracelet*
1988	*Sweet Day, Bitter Day*
1990	*Crabs*
1991	*Wild Desire*
1992	*Ice-Cream in Glym*
1993	*America Abracadabra*
1993	*Strawberry War*
1995	*Traffic Light*
1995	*Nutshells*
1996	*Secrets of the Heart* (video)

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♠ Good news, my darlings, for all of us who have loved the Luxor Winter Palace immortalised by **Agatha Christie**. The hotel, which is now part of the Sofitel chain, has been declared part of our protected heritage by the Supreme Council of Antiquities, which in plain parlance means that no developer is going to be able to tear it down one day and replace it with one of the ugly towers described as modern architecture in polite circles. From now on, thanks to the efforts in preservation of Accor Hotels S.A.E., when you go to Luxor, says **Hala El-Khatib**, public relations manager of Accor, you can enjoy the kind of gracious living our elders were so fond of, without fearing that it will soon go the way of so many of our beautiful buildings, which have crumbled under the wrecking ball. Who knows? Maybe you too will be inspired, and come up with a masterpiece or two, or, more modestly, a Pharaonic vignette which unravels in the winding corridors and charming salons of the hotel.







(l-r) Winter Palace; Carine Fahmi; Mahmoud Bakr

♣ I was treated last week to the antics of both the bold and the beautiful when I attended the election of Miss Egypt 1998. The 14 beautiful candidates appeared before an inflexible jury of academics, artists and luminaries of the entertainment world, among whom I spotted playwright **Mohamed Salmawy**, head of the jury, **Ismail Mubarak**, director of International Relations at the Gezira Sheraton, famous actress **Iman** and **Dalia El-Beheiri**, Miss Egypt 1990. This year, the winner, **Carine Fahmi**, was crowned not only for her beauty, but also for her intelligence and the breadth of her general culture.

♥ *Weekly* reporter **Mahmoud Bakr**, who has been most intent on keeping us up to date with environmental issues, has recently been awarded a certificate of excellence by the Helwan Environmental Organisation, headed by **Mahmoud El-Sherbini**, in recognition of the outstanding work he has done this year in helping to rid Helwan of pollution.